

SCENE II – DYNAMICS

The atmosphere of dialogue, the flavor of their attitudes, the ebb and flow of their serotonin balances, the matrix of their conversation; the evocations of their dictions, the relative paces of their thoughts, the development of the subject, the collected timbre of all their expressions;

the interval of Time in Danny's Apartment: the arrangement, layout, furnishings, and decorations of the living room, broken in by its comfortably untidy condition, animated by its cumulative ambiance; the smell of stale smoke and weed and cooked eggs, the pertinently low light;

the night containing it: the date (October 14, 2011), the phase of its moon (waning gibbous), the temperature (57° Fahrenheit at their arrival; 52° during their cigarette on the balcony), the wind (NE 6 mph);

the intersection of their lives, the sixty years between their births; the numbered days between Jack and his death, the expanding stretch of Time between Danny and Last Week; their generational gap; their educational gap; Jack's virginity; Danny's sexual entropy;

∞ a few dubious coincidences: that they'd both been parentless since they were teenagers, that they'd both been to three funerals; that they crossed paths while both were alone, and that neither had morning plans; that, together, they became a whiskey; that neither had died yet; that Jack had not fallen asleep on the couch, and that Danny had not yet had some kind of outburst; that they were both mildly allergic to cats;

∞ furthermore, a couple noteworthy anecdotes: after seven days of virtually no use, Danny's cell phone had died that morning, and after a glance around his room for its charger, he resigned it to its fate, and hadn't thought about it since; Jack had been spending many of his unnarrated thoughts recounting the strange ∞ apt sequence of events that brought him to the bar (whose name, Cosmopolitan Purlieux [often shortened to 'Cosmos'; see Act IV], he'd already forgotten);

his car (a Buick Roadmaster, deep ∞ cheap red with wood panels) suffered from an invisible gauge malfunction that revealed itself about eleven seconds before Jack ran out of gas along I-95, around seven o'clock, at which point he walked the better part of a mile to the next exit, bought a five-gallon can, and lugged it all the way back to his car, only to find it drowned in red-and-blue lights, and a county sheriff waiting behind it, who told Jack he'd pulled over illegally and didn't even leave his hazards on, and before hearing Jack's defense, told him to drive to the next county if he didn't want a ticket, and the first town in the next county happened to be Patusan;

which sounded strangely familiar to him, but he couldn't quite figure out why; he filled up his tank, and while driving back to the highway, felt suddenly and inexplicably enamored with the roads around him, the purple asphalt, the street names; so he located a hotel, requested a room, and asked the lady at the front desk where to get a drink; she sent him to the Cider-Brick-and-Cherry, presumably forgetting that it was a Friday night, and while Jack was smoking a cigarette outside the well-populated club, considering where to go instead, a drunk girl (who happened to be Emily, from Act I, the daughter of the owner of the grocery store attached to the pharmacy where Danny and I first met) bummed one from him, subsequently commented on his age, and then suggested he try the Tap Closet;

but her directions led him directly to Cosmos, which he circled several Times before deciding to peek inside, compelled by the scarcity of cars in its parking lot; ∞ he soon found out from the bouncer (who, for the first

Time in many decades, asked Jack if that was a Scandinavian accent) that there is no bar in Patusan called the Tap Closet, but Cosmos has the biggest whiskey selection in town;

so Jack went in and got an order of fries, which he picked at without much commitment until he realized he was thirstier than he was hungry, so he relocated to the bar, ordered a scotch, and within a few minutes, he was snooping through Danny's scrawled napkin parables, and that progenitorial Still: Prettier this way.

And so Jack was notably free of agenda, like an interstellar planet that belongs to no star's gravity, having escaped the routine of the past sixty years of farm work for one sweet evening, finding himself suspended in free Time, some fourteen hours before he was supposed to be in Boston, accounting for the attitude with which he approached the evening;

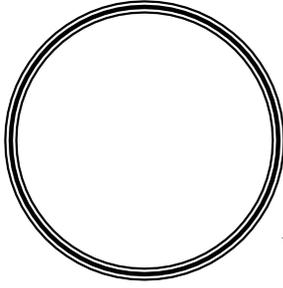
Danny, meanwhile, had little to no memory of what had brought him to Cosmos that evening, except for the faint assumption that it would probably be mostly empty; in fact, as he recalled it, it seemed he had only been awake as long as he'd been speaking to Jack: the entire unwritten narrative of October 11th in daylight was, in his mind, consumed by the white space of that same progenitorial Still; as though the seven days preceding their first exchange had gone mute, woven through a dream, lost in Panicked Time, sculpted away from the statue of Danny's pneuma like the sloughing of negative space: defined by absence;

& in and out of the living room, between words and silence, the presence and affairs of sweet Incitatus: he had learned through Danny's well-intentioned neglect to self-feed, and like Danny he only ate at night, in binges; between his small hourly feasts and his absence, he was the sole physical witness to their secluded narrative, experiencing it like a reader who doesn't understand English, informed only by universal expressions: Danny's erratic behavior, Jack's unfamiliar presence and comparative reticence, the low light and heat; the smell; etc.;

& suddenly all three patrons of that moment, the man, the myth, and the cat, for the duration of the following Scene, experienced a deixic acceleration through the subconscious, at first comfortably embraced in the gravity of the dialogue's atmosphere; and then suspended at the center of mass between Act II and another force, which reeled them in, ever faster than before, toward its impossible mass (weight, soul;)—

The Click:





“You don’t stay up late much, do you,” Danny noted.

“I’m a creature of habit,” Jack said. “So, no.” He took a sip of his coffee. Danny watched him, puzzled by the gradual unveiling of his personality, suddenly vigilant for any telling characteristics, fixating on questions so long that he became insecure about whether to ask them.

—What was her name?

—I heard this, somewhere:

Though he couldn’t remember where. But he thought of Patusan. What was her name. He fixated; he found another from his list:

“How about music?” he asked.

“Not really,” Jack said.

—Shame.

He consulted his list;

“Why’d you pick the name Jack when you moved here?” Danny said.

“Oh boy. I don’t know if I really had a reason. I hardly remember actually picking it. But between the day I arrived and, I guess about a month later, when Ron Coldred helped me forge an ID in Maine, I must’ve met five Jacks. The first American I saw in America was called Jack. He worked on the docks where we landed, helped anchor the ship and unload everything from the cargo hull, and I guess he had something worked out with Gerry—Gerry Coldred, the one who brought me here, and whose brother—Ron—got me set up on a farm a few weeks later. So Jack the dockhand and Gerry Coldred helped smuggle us twenty refugees from the basement of the ship into a nearby schoolhouse—it was summer Time, so nobody was there—some Time in the middle of the night.

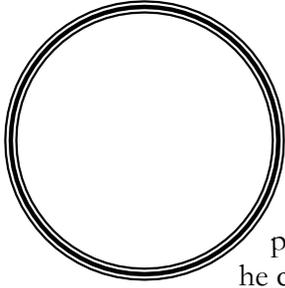
“Dockhand Jack was kind, the sort of person who’d drop whatever career pursuits he may have had—I think he was in the Navy right up till then—just to help refugees find safety. You know, the sort of person who actually thrives on improving other people’s lives, so as he helped us set up camp in the schoolhouse, he asked us all about our journeys, our experiences, and he really listened to us, and it really struck me, because in Norway—in Europe, for those—for however long I’d been there in War Time, everybody was so busy, so curt, so suspicious: nobody cared to listen, because all of us lived in fear, exhaustion, waking up from one nightmare straight into another, day in and day out, tomorrow never guaranteed—but Jack the dockhand, he really cared. He hadn’t seen combat, at least not since the first War, and he never seemed wrecked by it, the way we did: like he’d filled whatever void is dug out of you, when you see that kind of thing—not like something’s gone missing, but like a part of you that was once fused has been cleft in two. And I guess he’d stitched it, or maybe it never happened to him in the first place—but his eyes, his tone, you know, his texture as a human being, he’d fashioned it back together to be so welcoming, so concerned.”

“Dockhand Jack,” Danny laughed.

“And then I met a boy named Jack, younger than I was by a few years. He lived in the orphanage I stayed at while Ron got my job set up. His father died in combat, and then his mother lost her mind, and he’d been living there ever since.”

“Was the US involved that early?” Danny said.





“No—you’re right. I’m borrowing from another memory. I can’t remember exactly what happened to him. But his father did die, and his mother did lose her mind, and he’d been there ever since. I’ve never seen a child more shaken by the loss of his parents—and by then I’d seen quite a few. He stopped speaking when he came to the orphanage, years before I showed up, and really stuck to it. I never heard the sound of his voice. But they called him Jack. The caregivers brought out dinner every night and Jack—”

“—Orphan Jack—”

“—Orphan Jack would have a meltdown every Time. His fits—he’d get really quiet, you know, more quiet than before, and really still, and he’d stop blinking, just stare into space, and usually he’d acknowledge you if you spoke to him, but during his fits—when the caregivers tried to make him sit down and eat, or put him to sleep, or anything his parents would do for him if they were still around—he’d shut off, go totally blank, and as they tried to communicate with him he’d start shaking, more violently the more they spoke, and then they’d give him some ether and bring him upstairs and we wouldn’t see him again until the morning. Once or twice I saw his fits end in a seizure, I think that was the last Time I witnessed a seizure—but strangest of all, you didn’t really pity him, because he was so disconnected: never embarrassed, or even particularly vulnerable, I think he just existed inside his own mind, so shut off from the outside world that he sort of swapped it for the other, internal reality for external. So his fits—you couldn’t really tell what he was experiencing, and so you never really judged it. You just knew that it hurt.”

“I thought this might be a happy story,” Danny

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lied.

“This isn’t a story,” Jack said. “He’s just the next Jack I met. I don’t know. When I was writing down my new name on a piece of scrap paper, the name felt like—I don’t know, like it’d already been chosen, by the clockwork God or whoever, like the multitude of Jacks transcribed the message for me: this is who you become. Even now I’m making it out to be more of a decision than it was—I had no agency, it just happened. I looked at the paper he gave me, and a split second of thought summoned ‘Jack’ into the vacuum left by ‘Einar.’ And I really didn’t care, anyways: I hadn’t committed to my new life, not yet, at least not mentally, and selecting a new name seemed—I don’t know, a little decadent?”

“I think I know what you mean.”

“Or maybe a little permanent—it’s hard to remember. But no, I had no Hero Jack, no idol on which to build my new identity. It arrived to me in crowds.”

“Tell me another.”

—Cast the Picnic of Jacks!

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“Let’s see,” he sighed. He consulted his list;

—like phases of the moon: Old Man Jack (waning crescent);

Jack Number Two (new);

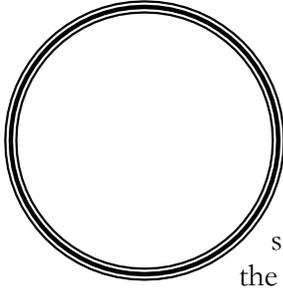
Dockhand Jack (waxing gibbous);

Orphan Jack (overcast);

& who else?

—Transient Jack (the cycle itself?);





“Ron found me a job at a little family farm near Bangor, so I took the train from Portland where we docked and went up to see him. That’s when he got me the ID. I was supposed to meet him somewhere near the University in Orono, I think, and on my way from the train station—yes, I guess you could chalk it up to that moment: I met another Jack, en route to choose my *new name*, though I didn’t know it at the Time.”

“What’s this Jack’s epithet?”

“I called him Transient Jack a moment ago, in my thoughts.”

“Transient Jack.”

“Homeless Jack, whatever you like—I found him in a little spot of grass under a footbridge. You could say he looked particularly homeless. He was writing on a sheet of paper when I saw him, and I stopped to ask him how to get to the University. We ended up talking for a little bit and I asked him what he was writing, and he showed me—they were adoption forms. I don’t know how he found them, but he had a whole folder full. He said he filled them out—pretended he had a kid that he didn’t want anymore—and stuck them in glass bottles and hid them around town. I asked him why, and he said—I wish I could remember his phrasing—he enjoyed depositing these little narratives of tragedy, objects that tell some kind of story, objects that become stranger the longer you think about them, unwittingly into people’s lives. He said, ‘Imagine you’re walking down by the river and you see a message in a bottle hidden in a knot in a tree. You take it out, all curious, and you pull out the message—and it’s one of these. First you guffaw, or maybe you chuckle, but then you begin to ask yourself: from where? and why?—and you squirm—and the implications get darker—and you shudder, and finally, if I’m successful, you chuckle one more Time.’ He said he’d done suicide notes but never felt good about it. Also said he did divorce papers, letters informing of tragic news, you know—a death or something—admissions of guilt, the sort of thing whose context speaks louder than its content.

“Again I asked him why. Some distant memories—of spoken words, almost exclusively—I can recall with such clarity that some Times I wonder if my brain is revising them in secret and lying to me about it. But his words I do remember, because I was struck at the Time by how straightforward and confident they were—my grasp of spoken English was still improving—and how archetypically vagabond: he said:

‘I’m making mirrors out of smoke for all you strangers.’”

“What do you think that means?” Danny said.

“I have no idea. But he really believed it was a good thing. I guess he thought he was desensitizing tragedy, if you can make that leap—but I’ll say it again, he was particularly homeless.”

“Tell me what that means to you,” Danny said.

“Well, I was enjoying our conversation until he finished filling out the adoption form, he rolled it up and slid it into a bottle, and then he pulled his john out of his pants and started filling it up with piss, getting it all over his hands, laughing like a crazy son of a bitch.”

“Oh yeah. You haven’t seen ‘particularly homeless,’” Danny teased.

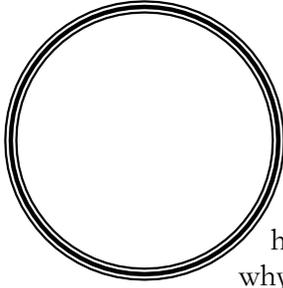
“Well, it’s been a long Time since I’ve been in a city,” Jack said.

“Yeah, meth’s been discovered since then,” Danny said. Jack paused.

“My landlord’s son is in recovery,” he said.

“The one you’re picking up tomorrow?”





“He’s the one.”

“Bummer,” Danny said, unusually earnest. Jack laughed to himself and took a sip of his coffee, already struggling to remember why he’d brought Peter up. Quite suddenly it dawned on Jack that he’d be seeing him, Peter, tomorrow, after however long he’d been travelling—Jack couldn’t recall, but at least since the summer—and he tried to imagine how the reunion might go, and specifically how it might make him feel—whether he’d realize he missed the kid, or realize that he didn’t. At the moment he couldn’t seem to recall the character of their relationship whatsoever; he worried his age might finally be blurring his memories.

“Old Transient Jack,” Danny sang. “So that’s it? Three Jacks in one month?”

“I don’t know, maybe I met more. It’s been a long Time.”

“Do you ever wonder what happened to them? the Jacks—how’d it go—Shipman Jack—”

“—Dockhand Jack—”

“—Orphan Jack, and Transient. I assume the homeless guy’s dead.”

“He was as old then as I am now,” Jack said, momentarily reliving a memory from his youth: Young Jack wondering how it would feel to grow old, being so curious about the future that he tried to embed the memory of *that* moment permanently in his mind, ‘Remember *this* moment when you’re old,’ so he could revisit it years later with answers to all his youthful questions, grinning.

“How old was Dockhand Jack?”

“He’s dead, too,” said Jack. “I bet he was forty. And Jack from the orphanage—who knows, but nothing too good, I’m sure.”

“Does that upset you? I mean, as old as you are—when you remember people from your childhood, knowing they’re all—gosh. Never mind. I’m sorry.”

“Eventually it’s just the next thing you do. Like when everyone starts getting married at your age.”

“Jesus,” Danny said.

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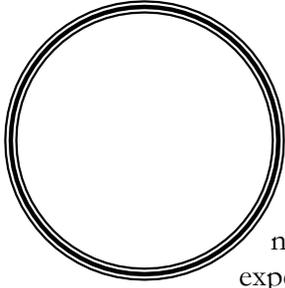
“The fear subsides after a while,” Jack said. “I’m not afraid of dying. I don’t know that I’ve been afraid of dying since I fled the War. It’s more like—I don’t know, the end of a long day, as platitudinous as it sounds. The anxiety of Time and all the little things that flutter around you, the fear of not accomplishing what you need to, it all just falls away, like sugar in hot tea, and you wind yourself down till you’re sleepy, and—what else?”

“I’m terrified of death.”

“Are you?” Jack said, and Danny was silent. “I think fear of death is somewhat of a reductive term. It’s fear of three things. You can be afraid of death itself—the moment of death, whether it’s the pain, or the recognition of your own fate, or the revulsion of panic, which is so uncomfortable—afraid of the present tense death. Or you’re afraid of what happens after you die, the future tense of death: whether you find heaven or hell, paradise or the void, reincarnation into a darker life, you know—or, I suppose, it could also be the fear of your death’s repercussions, the impact on your friends, your family, whoever.

“And the past tense of death—when you’re not afraid of death itself, but that it marks the ending of your life: that a finite and objective moment exists after which you will never





again experience sensation: whatever it is you'll miss, reading the news or fever chills—surely the little things—the conclusion of experience itself.”

“Which speaks most to you?” Danny asked.

“When I was young I was afraid of the moment of death. I remember feeling deeply disturbed by the prospect of knowing when it'll happen—whether you're ill and the doctors say you've got a year to live, and every day gets a little smaller, and every day life gets a little smaller, and all you can do is wait, and deteriorate—or, you know, even more momentary: to be shot or wounded in battle, to be hit by a car: the pain is one thing, because pain is temporary, but the sheer panic of that knowledge, holding onto the last threads of your life so desperately, too sudden to depart with any kind of grace, the evolutionary subconscious groping for survival, the psychological anguish of seeing, face-to-face, the end of life itself.”

“At least the present is so short,” Danny said.

—The presentist durontologist fears the pain;
—the eternalist perontologist fears what follows;
—& the chronontologist disciple of the growing block universe,
—(me)
—fears the passing of what's passed.

“That's exactly what I came to learn. It's so short, but it constitutes the entirety of our experience. As I got older it subsided into the fear of what follows. I'm not religious. I'm not afraid of Hell. But something about eternity, the liberation from this monologic passage through the world, with its guaranteed exit, so comforting, disturbs me—to be aware of a conclusion gives you a schedule, but when that agency and that promise fade, what's left? a void—an eternal lack of sensation, a state you cannot escape for the remaining duration of—everything.”

“But when you're in that state, you can't experience the eternity—you said it yourself: it's the conclusion of sensation.”

“I suppose you're right, it's not the experience of eternity. It's the jurisdiction of eternity: the promise of endless sameness, the death of change, the death of contrast.”

“So you don't fear the ending of experience? the past tense death?”

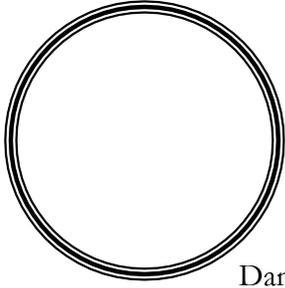
“That's the easiest one! you can't miss a moment if you don't know you missed it.”

“That's what scares me most. The exclusion factor. Nobody considers you anymore, because you're not part of—this. A betrayal is no longer a betrayal: the emotional cringe I've always felt at that phrase, ‘What he doesn't know won't hurt him’—secrets kept, the vocative interaction of two others and no subject to witness it—and suddenly when there is no subject, the intimacy of those secrets—they become ubiquitous, right? like you've lost the privilege of experience, and every feather of your deliberation dissolves, and everything becomes a secret kept from you, kept by all your closest friends, free of remorse. I don't know.”

“Me neither,” said Jack. They each finished their coffee.

- 3. The death of the present: Robby;
- 2. The death of the future: Mrs. Silver; what was her name?
- 1. The death of the past:—the Lifeguard's Boat—





—What was her name?

Danny looked at the picture to his left, Mrs. Silver with her arm around his shoulders, erect between the camera lens and his childhood home; he could recall no memories from before that moment, like he'd stopped growing up at ten years old.

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—3. The death of the past: Ron;

—2. The death of the present: Old Farmer Conrad;

—1. The murder of the future: what was her name?

Jack began to feel separated from the ground below (the text) but not on account of the vacuum between Danny's apartment and its home: rather that he stood at the edge of the precipice of space, already leaning too far forward to stop himself from falling into a vacancy that defines what is vacant.

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Danny, too.

Incitatus finished the food in his bowl and stalked Danny's legs from beneath the table.

—Wait for breakfast like the rest of us.

Whatever comfort the low light and head had previously offered them waned, Danny wrapping himself more tightly in his layers, nestling against the corner of the couch, while Jack sat the same as before, visited by an occasional shiver, the room too dark to see his eyes. Danny wondered if he'd left a window open.

—You must vacuum seal your reference frame.

The week behind him began to fill up with a dull haze.

—I discern two manifestations of Now:

—1. The Small Now, which lives inside whichever word your gaze is touching.

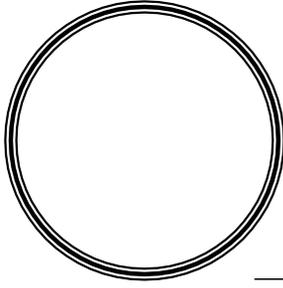
—1.b (The specious present).

—2. The general Now, which defies a concrete border: it begins at the earliest event (event A) that constitutes your present mental landscape; it has no objective threshold, but it shrinks the closer you look for one; typically, it lasts from a couple weeks to a couple months; it expands outward from event A, until an equally or more influential event B occurs, and bumps your previous general Now into what you might call your general Yesterday. It is defined by what *has been* happening, it is the Relative Now: you can find it by tracing key moments backwards in Time, formless, hidden between the specious present (Absolute Now) and your oldest recent memory whose recollection does not invoke nostalgia;

that is, if Time were a wall, a laser pointer moving along it would indicate the Absolute Now, and the glow surrounding the laser's point would illuminate the Relative Now.

—And it seems that the Relative Now reveals itself only when you realize it no longer contains a memory it used to. When a weekend away slips quietly from Just Last Week into the cache of Back Then; and so often, a night's sleep to carry us from Relative Today into Relative Tomorrow is all that we need: to see This become That, a concrete threshold between them.





—And somehow, it seems, I have just experienced that exact transition, some Time between writing my scrawled parables and returning from the balcony: the week behind me filled up with a dull haze, that unspoken moment of crisis, blacked out, frozen, tucked away, buried deep, ignored, now lies at the far end of that dull haze, the deixic recognition of its occurrence translated from a subject into an object, as though I'd been sleeping, and now I'm awake.

—Not unlike railing two points of ketamine, in fact:

—somewhat of a psychological shower.

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When Jack looked, the patina of fatigue had vanished from Danny's eyes, and Jack saw in them, for a moment, the same Aryan blue eyes of his father, the same redoubled will written in his face that he'd seen meet the gaze of Lehmann, his body destroyed but his expression unfailingly spirited, challenging any pain of such magnitude, any suffocating tendrils of fear, any vertex of despair, intrusion of panic, threat of violence: daring them to stand between him and his family, him and his dogma, him and his life: so stalwart that his sheer mental endurance postponed the reality of his ruined body, a moment so rare—to witness a mind as equipped to defend itself as its body, for few have such fortitude.

“How are you?” his left brain chose to say.

“I feel dizzy,” Danny said.

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When Danny looked, a feature of Jack's expression had vanished, one which Danny didn't recognize until it was gone, and only then could he identify it as a long-fermented surrender, whose vacuum was filled suddenly with a cousin of fear: apprehension, perhaps, of some invisible threat, like the future changed its disposition and became Jack's antagonist, but he did not quite look *afraid*: it was trepidation, concern, peppered with confusion.

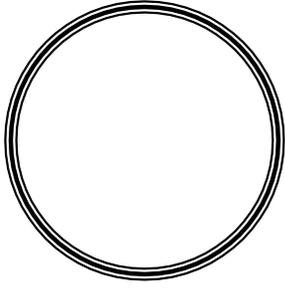
“How are you?” Danny asked.

“When I close my eyes I feel like I'm dreaming,” Jack said.

“Tell me more about your landlord's son.”

“Landlord doesn't feel like the right word. When Ron Coldred set up my job in Bangor, my landlord's father still ran the farm. I was young, and he looked after me—Old Farmer Conrad is what we called him. I couldn't call him a surrogate father figure, nothing like that. But he wanted to keep me fed, healthy, safe. He liked me. I worked hard. I had a lot of energy to channel. He was not young, already in his forties. He had a stable of horses and competed all over the east coast in riding competitions, he made his own saddles from his own leather, raised chickens and a couple pigs—he built the farmhouse on his own, after the first War, the same one I still live in. He built all the sheds, all the fences, all by himself.





“Truly an extraordinary man, but not much room for compassion. He was kind but he never fought for anything. Just for his own livelihood, his land, his principles. It continues to baffle me that he volunteered to house an illegal refugee. He had a wife named Juliette, they’d been married since the end of War, and lived through the Great Depression together, and flourished, amazingly—I arrived long after their golden years. You could see it all around the property. They raised cattle and sheep, Juliette made coats and blankets, and with a few hired hands they made this enormous garden, and Conrad built a grocer’s stall to sell the produce out of—they’d sell all different cuts of different meats, vegetables, spices, fertilizers, baked goods, brewed their own corn whiskey, everything you could think of. He offered his construction services to the town, helped a dozen families build their homes, their barns, their sheds—crates, boats, roofs, traps—car repairs, hide tanning, he even offered low interest loans to some poor citizens, under the table. He and Juliette were crafty.

“A few years after I arrived, Juliette gave birth to Cliff. I don’t think they wanted to have children before then, the world in such turmoil—I think they’d grown to fear it, you know: the market, the global politics—and they were right. Conrad was fifty when he gave birth to Cliff, Juliette must have been in her mid thirties. He was their only child. I helped raise him, for a little while, but then they sent him away to boarding school, before he’d even hit puberty, and after that, he went straight to university in New York City, and I think they were surprised when he came back. Said he wanted to keep working on the farm—even with a degree in economics.

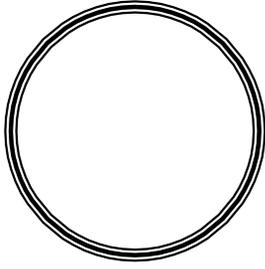
“Conrad died in ’77, three years after Cliff returned from school. He took over straight away, but he looked to me for guidance—I’d been there for—almost—thirty years. Even as I got older, I stayed committed to my work. I had a lot of energy to channel. Juliette passed on soon after. She was sixty four.

“Within a year of his mother’s funeral, Cliff met a woman from Portland called Penny and they got married. I loved her. She loved to paint. She loved to read. She had red hair. Every morning she’d sleep in late, and every night she’d go into the barn and read a story to the horses, but I think she just liked reading out loud where no one could hear her. Full of laughs, her cheeks always a little red, her eyes always a little wide. But for all that—she was remarkably dumb.”

—Classic;

“And the honeymoon phase vanished all at once, but not before he got her pregnant. I don’t mean to say they started fighting—they were happy. At least, she was happy—I think, for Cliff, the joy turned into comfort the morning after their wedding.





“They had a son and called him Peter, and Penny died of complications the next day.”

“Fuck,” Danny said. “You old people are full of tragedies.”

“It was a hard Time for us, but mostly for Peter. Cliff opened a business through the farm with Penny’s brother Wilton, who had a degree evolutionary biology, modifying seeds for local farmers. Wilton set up a team of seed researchers to do field work in a lab Cliff built for them. He funded most of the investments, handled most of the business, and provided all the land for trials. It kept him busy, above all else. He’d wake up before sunrise and we wouldn’t see him till dinner. He hired an au pair from Guatemala called Daniela who helped raise Peter with me, but he was having some real issues. He hardly slept till he was five or six, and he’d throw temper tantrums like you wouldn’t believe. Out of nowhere, I mean. He’d just clench his fists and scream. He said he had these thoughts—disturbing images, I guess, that he couldn’t get out of his head. I was clipping my nails one morning and the sound alone triggered a meltdown—the clicking, he said he could *feel* the clippers cutting too short, snipping that little thread of flesh where your nail diverges from your skin. He couldn’t handle the touch of cotton, because he couldn’t keep himself from imagining how it’d feel rubbed against his eyes. He came up with these horrible things, out of nowhere, and they’d sit in his brain, festering, incubating, drawing deep and slow wounds. The doctors diagnosed him with manic depression after a few years.”

“Really?”

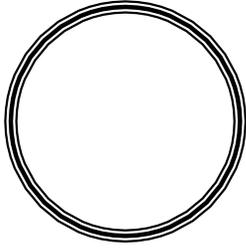
—It’s a small world, in hyperreality.

“After a while he’d just go through phases, mostly quiet, sometimes really wild. When he hit adolescence, Cliff sold their patents on gourd and squash seeds to some big distributor in the Midwest for a two million dollar payout, which he split evenly between all the shareholders—him, Wilton, and his two lab partners.”

“That’s a lot of money.”

“It’s not as much as you think. He had plenty of debt to pay off. Between starting the business and acquiring all the permits he needed—and paying Peter’s medical bills, paying Daniela, managing the farm—and it’s a big farm. Right now we’ve got seven hired hands. But even then he was always buying this new machine or that one, trying to keep up with the market around the turn of the millennium. He gave me a little bonus, too, but I think he realized after the money was gone that he’d have made a lot more if he held off on the sale. Although, in reality, I don’t know how much he cares.





“Either way. Peter started high school and became a very strange boy. He never spent Time with anybody. He kept a lot of journals, a lot of sketch books, read a lot—some of the strangest books. Bacterial biology textbooks. Lab report collections and dissertations. Art theory. Those enormous historical Timeline encyclopedias of specific places in history, you know, American Colonialism Through the Revolution, Classical Mathematics and Geometry, I don’t know. I don’t even know if he read them. But he loved to flick through them, underline meaningless phrases, and he’d fill the margins with these tiny, meticulous ink drawings, swirls and spikes and spirals as small as he could draw them without the ink spreading into a big blot. Every day he had a new passion, and every day it was stranger than the last.”

“You know,” Danny said, “he sounds a lot like me.”

Jack didn’t seem sure whether to laugh, or—not.

“After he graduated he moved down to Portland for a little while. I think he got a job doing lights at a theater—something like that, when he came back for holidays he told stories about dancers and actors and musicians, the whole bohemian lot, a big community of thespians. That’s when he got into drugs.”

“Sounds like that kind of crowd.”

—& yet, sounds too pretty;

“He didn’t live with us anymore so I didn’t see much of it. He started calling and asking Cliff for money. Then he got arrested on a distribution charge, but got it dropped by agreeing to three months of out-patient, so he moved back in with us.”

“Lucky for him. That’s not the cookie cutter meth story.”

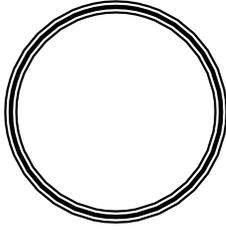
“He’s always been a smart kid, if nothing else. He’s been clean since last January, as far as I know. Three months of out-patient, ninety days of rehab, followed by a whole lot of counseling. You’re right, though. He got out all right.”

“I’ll say, if he’s been travelling Europe.”

“He saved a lot of money. I don’t know how, but he saved a lot. Cliff didn’t want him to go at first, but he saved the money—and I guess he’d probably earned it, right? That’s a tough thing.”

“One of the toughest.”





“It might be a little strange, having him back. I hadn’t really thought about it till now.”

“You think he’s changed?”

“He’s never really stopped changing,” Jack said.

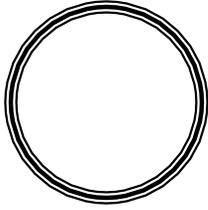
“I think addiction has a way of freezing people,” Danny said. “I have friends who started smoking glass when they were seventeen, eighteen, and five years later when they finally quit, when they start the recovery process, they sort of continue where they left off. Like the brain pauses during the addiction. And then, what’s really disturbing, the brain stops developing when you’re, what, twenty three? twenty five? so by the Time all these people recover from their addictions, they’re trapped inside a mind that stopped developing years ago, and a mind that, during that period, lost its ability to resume development. A lot of people, once they get clean, they kind of crystalize into one form, one shape, and I think it’s really hard for some people to break out of that. You see people who overcome alcoholism or meth or opioids or benzodiazepines, and they get stuck in the same cycle, their lives get really small, because that’s the only way they feel safe. They need to keep their worlds small, because once you’re an addict, you know, you’re always an addict. You can get clean but with those kinds of drugs, the deeper, I don’t know, carnal desire for the high, it never goes away. Once you’ve gone down that road you can’t forget what it looks like. Once you’ve had a slice of that cake, you spend the rest of your life knowing that you *really* like that cake. You can never kill the craving. You can only subdue it, indefinitely.”

“Do you know someone? who’s—you know, gone through that? Someone close to you?” Jack asked.

--

“I know a few people,” Danny said. Jack hadn’t made any assumptions about the nature of Danny’s community, but he wouldn’t have guessed they were particularly prone to addiction, judging by his own experience, which seemed to suggest drug use generally results from either an unresolved trauma or a lack of education. He looked closely at Danny, and he certainly saw his education. But the trauma—for a generation so detached from the tragedies of the past, the violence of War, the protracted history of hatred and oppression, poverty, incurable disease—who are the demons they fear?





When Jack looked through Danny's reference frame, generalizing his sociological position, he found it difficult to discern the category of trauma that could so regularly haunt a community of white (he was fairly certain), generally middle class (considering the apartment and the value of alcohol Jack had watched him consume) people, free from War, free from famine, free from the raw, explicit oppression Jack witnessed in his youth.

—I have always wondered how the powerful statesmen of ancient Rome managed to care so mortally about such intangible commodities: honor, pride, courage, reputation:

—how can someone value these abstractions enough to sacrifice their lives for them? to fear above all else a consequence fully stripped of its physical reality? This is how.

—To transcend the threat of death (as people like myself understand it), to achieve a height of living such that the instinctual fear you might endure with, say, a rifle pointed at your chest, becomes so detached from your daily reality that it ceases to occupy much real estate in the fabric of your thoughts.

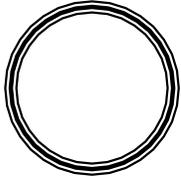
—But the vacuum of those fears must always be filled; & so what is the nature of Instinct when it transcends physical necessity into social necessity?

—It must be that Woe is proportional to context: the Woe of War, my own personal tragedy, must have much the same gravity on my mind as Danny's nebulous Woe has on his own mind—despite the radical disparity of their magnitudes—I assume. And that dialectic I will never understand, because my mind has evolved in adaptation to the first fear, the vivid fear of death, panic precipitated by physical events; as though Danny's mind is two generations ahead in evolution, evolved enough to recognize the true Woe in something I might mistake for bad luck.

—Nothing seems to me as grotesque as the comparison of tragedies.

“I hesitate to admit that I've been through it too,” Danny said. Jack's internal monologue went mute. “Because it's never been addiction. I've struggled—I've medicated myself, but it never matured into an addiction. I've never needed the high, only the relief.”





“What drugs?” Jack asked. Danny laughed.

“I think I told you about my friend Connor,” he said.

“The one with the mansion in Cape May,” Jack nodded.

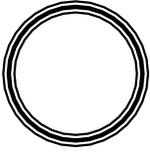
“Right. His grandfather built that house, his name was Sam Engelkin. He grew up in the south, somewhere in Mississippi I think, and he studied architecture back during the industrial revolution. And he was really well off—his family, you know, Old Money southerners. He built himself a house in Mississippi and then his grandfather, who’d made a fortune before the Civil War, passed away, leaving him property all over the east coast. He met a woman named Elizabeth and they got married and had a child, Connor’s father, and I think—it’s been a while since I’ve heard the story—she wanted to buy a villa in Spain. You know, more than anything else. So Sam the architect came up with a plan to sell all the property his grandfather left him and use the money to build one great house, so grand and beautiful he could make enough selling it for the two of them to retire, live out the rest of their lives together, lost somewhere in the Pyrenees.”

“Sounds lovely.”

“No kidding. So he built it. Twelve Jefferson Street, Cape May. It occupies the whole block. Three stories high, something like fifteen foot ceilings, I mean—the place is ridiculous. The first floor has a huge, wide open living space attached to—you know, actually, the kitchen’s pretty humble compared to the rest of the house. Still big, and it’s got a butler pantry the size of my Guest Room. There’s a sun porch that wraps around the whole northern and eastern sides of the house, a fireplace as big as a car, and, of course, a spiral staircase in the center, going up all three floors. The second floor’s all bedrooms, almost a dozen of them, plus a fucking ballroom. I mean a real ballroom. The third floor has an attic study and a few more bedrooms and two balconies that look right out over the shore. It’s a dramatic place to live.”

—His Woes must be quite the same as my fantasies.





“Of course, Sam’s wife Elizabeth died as soon as he’d finished construction, while he was trying to sell it.”

—We old people...

“And of course, he lost his mind. I’m pretty sure he ended up killing himself. Connor’s father inherited the house but never lived in it. He got Connor’s mom pregnant but they didn’t get married, and then he moved to New Orleans while Connor grew up in Jersey, and the two of them never spoke. Connor doesn’t even know when he died, but when he turned eighteen, the estate guys came and told him the place was his.”

“Lucky man,” Jack said.

“I swear to God that mansion’s cursed,” Danny said. “This is where it gets crazy. Connor moved into the house with his girlfriend as soon as he finished high school, and his girlfriend was named Elizabeth too, just like his grandmother. They got engaged real young, had their whole lives pretty much set up for them. I didn’t know him back then, I wouldn’t meet him for another few years, but in his stories they lived like black market royalty. Drugs and sex and not much else. But Elizabeth—the second one—she died less than a year after they moved in, drunk driving. She wasn’t even twenty.”

—You young people!

“And Connor lost his mind, just like his grandfather. He didn’t kill himself, of course, but he locked himself up in that mansion and didn’t see the light of day for years. Just sealed himself off from the outside world. He’d gotten enough money with the house that he didn’t have to work, but after a couple years he set it up like a grocery store for substances. That’s when I met him. Merlot’s friend in Cape May invited us to visit and introduced us to him. I was twenty two, I think—maybe twenty one. We had no trouble becoming friends. He was a wreck, though, locked up in that place, anywhere from a few to a few dozen squatters, addicts, distant friends, living in all his Guest Rooms, sleeping all day long.”





“And Christ, could they do drugs.” He paused for a moment. “I feel weird talking to you about this.”

“Do you?” He paused for another moment.

“It was a fucking mess. We went to see him a few Times a year, and when I was twenty four I spent the whole summer with him. So I got to see it in phases. First it was the psychs, as always. Microdosing on acid analogues for weeks at a Time. Dimethyltryptamine. Then it was the party drugs, rollies, cocaine, horse tranquilizers, whatever. But every real member of the counterculture knows the pattern. It’s all fun and games for a couple years. You experiment, you try it all, you explore all the different worlds. But after a while the excitement starts to fade, and before you know it you’re doing lines alone in your room. At first you do it for the experience. But once you’ve tried everything new, you just do it to feel different. And that’s when it gets dangerous. The psychs and the rollies—coke replaces them all. And when the coke starts to feel like decaf, which it always does, eventually, everyone turns to glass. They’d stay up for days till it stopped working and then they’d hit the smack and pass out till their tolerance went back down. A big cycle, three days on one, three days on the other, but, you know, three days turns into two, two days turns into one. Then you need the glass to wake up every morning. And the only way to sustain it as a daily habit is to curb it with dope so you can fall asleep every night. And then you’re doing both daily, and that’s when you know it’s over.”

“Over?”

“Well, maybe not. He’s doing a little better now. He—*we*—lost a lot of friends in those few years. Nobody I was too close with, but you can only keep it up for so long before you realize you’re not young and invincible anymore. Some went to jail. Some overdosed. Some disappeared. But a couple of us got clean.”





“But he’s still around?” Jack asked, staring at the far window, motionless.

“Yeah. We still keep in touch. He’s not such a crazy son of a bitch anymore. Still stays in that house all day, still struggles with a whole mess of issues. But back in those days—2006, 2007, 2008—he could have died at any moment. We all could have. It’s a miracle that we didn’t. Lately, though, he’s been quiet. More quiet than usual, and he’s usually pretty quiet. I think that happens to some people when their lives start slowing down, particularly people whose lives started out so fast. The wealthy and the beautiful, the reckless and the tortured. Black market royalty.”

Jack shook his head to sever his frozen gaze. He went to take a sip of his coffee but remembered it was empty, and so he lit a cigarette.

“So what does Connor do all day?” he asked. His mind’s projection of Connor’s appearance refused to age through the Timeline of Danny’s story, maintaining the same teenaged face that first opened its eyes during his fiancé’s funeral, year in and year out, like exposure to the sun would inscribe the passage of Time upon his young and soft skin, but, hidden in the darkness of his mansion, his body was mummified, his face crystalized, eternalizing the expression of his Woe.

“Not a lot,” Danny said. “You’d think he’d read, or something. But I’ve seen him lay on a bed for hours without moving, without getting bored. He likes to cook. He likes loud music. It’s never quiet in Connor’s Mansion.”

“He hasn’t met another girl since Elizabeth?” Jack asked, prodding for another ending. —You that are young!

“Not that I know of. He may as well have become a monk. I think he waited too long. I think he holed himself up in that place for one too many years, and now it’s too late.”





“Too late?” Jack asked.

—Too late for what?

“Too late to escape,” Danny said.

—Escape?

“Escape what?” Jack asked.

“I don’t know. The past.”

—What’s passed?

“You don’t think—”

—proportionally!—

“—the passage of Time—I don’t know—offers distance?”

—refuge?

“I think that’s what it’s too late for,” Danny said.

—But if it’s longer than any distance...!

“What did he miss?” Jack begged.

“Some Times the skin seals before the wound heals.”

—No, no—

“Are you all right?” Danny asked.

“—never too late—”

—doesn’t move so fast—

“Jack?”

“—for *so long*—”

“ ”

—*the Click!*





—He brought it up.

-

Danny.

-

—All right. The moment, then. The event horizon. The center of mass. The threshold into the other’s gravity. The other: later; tomorrow; after. The threshold into the future’s gravity. I see a see saw. The moment. The Now. The Still. I see a fulcrum.

Here’s Act III—

—The Still—

—I see. That’s me.

This is the quickest way to the water.

-

—Which, till all’s been made flat...

(—always seeking its lowest state:

the floor of the Lifeguard’s Boat [& any parallel false minimum/lung], or:

its true minimum state; entropy—)

...will never cease to move.

“I don’t want to feel this way anymore.

But I don’t want to die,”

^

and I can’t forget—

—The Still—



••

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Moments spread thin. Time dilated. The jaws of the outside world shut around them.

—Always quiet in Danny’s Apartment.

Danny’s eyes were shut. He sat nestled against the corner of the chaise lounge, tapping his fingers on his leg in an paradiddle, breathing slowly and silently through his nose, a slight twitch in his eyebrows. Jack longed for access to his foreign thoughts.

—Time is running out:

—looking for a door or window left open,

—running out of its punctured vacuum seal.

Jack searched for the thread of their conversation through the fading warmth. The longer he searched the further back it fell. Danny’s eyes remained shut, and Incitatus stood in the doorway to the kitchen, frozen in his prowl, front left paw suspended off the floor, eyes burning through something under the coffee table. He did not move.

“What a struggle,” Danny said at last, breaking the suffocating silence. “I bet the first bundle of cells that came alive were fucking terrified.”

Jack tried to ask what he meant but only silence came from his mouth.

“Like waking up for the very first Time. Emerging into this fabric of chaos, a lopsided, unrefined, untested draft of consciousness, with no advisor or overseer, no editor. Nothing to construct your reality around: no language, no thoughts, no knowledge, no history: just blank, sloppy existence. Just a big messy bulk of matter, suddenly and unwittingly thrust into animation, without its consent, without any preparation, without any idea what’s happening—like waking up for the very first Time, but in that very first moment, you’re drowning under a crashing wave, slipping in and out of consciousness, from meek sentence back into physical matter—such a struggle.”

“You think about the strangest things,” Jack said.

“Your ash is about to fall off.”



Jack looked at the cigarette he forgot he'd been smoking, and as soon as he moved his hand to tap it in the frying pan, it broke off and fell onto Danny's carpet, feathered into grey dust.

"Sorry," he said.

-

—I'm a poet.

"What's going on in there?" Danny asked.

"I'm just tired. I'm getting old," Jack said. He lay his hands on his lap, palms up, looking down at their lines and wrinkles. Slowly he curled them in and out of gentle fists, running his fingers along the skin, lost somewhere in the Pyrenees. "I've been alive a long Time."

"And still no lung cancer," Danny said.

"You think you've got your whole life ahead of you to figure something out," Jack said. "And you keep saying that: 'your whole life.' But one day you wake up, and you don't know when exactly it happened because it happens over a long Time, but you realize it all at once: your whole life—it's behind you. It slips by unseen. All your plans settle into memories. And you never quite catch the transition."

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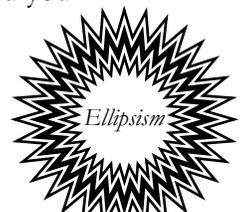
—And you never quite catch the ending.

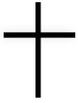
"What is it that slipped by you?" Danny asked.

-

"Life's usually got a way of finishing all its stories. It wraps everything up, nice and tight, fastens all the loose threads together, even if it takes you a long Time to realize it. But some Times that's not the case. Some Times they're abandoned, and left dreadfully unfinished. Some Times you abandon them without even knowing it. And when that happens, and you get to my age, you haven't got much left to think about."

"Life's a book of unfinished stories."





“You’ve got a long Time to finish them,” Jack said.

Danny looked over at him, eyeing the bewildering vessel of his body, the same organic machine continuing to run after eighty seven years, sustained through the most volatile century of human history, having endured the forces of chaos which so readily strip their victims of life: War, the death of parents, transcontinental travel; smoking; farmwork. Old Man Jack arrived through it all into this exact Still, fidgeting with the nub of his cigarette, ripping the filter’s paper shell away in a spiral, stretching the cotton into a long fray.

Danny stretched his legs under the coffee table, accidentally giving Incitatus, hidden in the shadows, a little kick. He hissed at Danny’s foot and darted across the room. Danny looked up at the ceiling.

—Wish it’d rain.

“Got to piss,” said Jack, rising from the couch. Danny remained motionless.

--

Jack held back a brief interval of hyperventilation until the bathroom door was safely shut behind him, turning on the faucet to obscure the noise, immediately collapsing to the floor in much the same position Danny had earlier, spilling air from his mouth instead of vomit, frustrated by the arid cavities of his eyes, clenching his gut and fists, craning his neck to stare up at the ceiling.

Consider two non-deixic parallel Stills:

Danny laying on the fainting chair, eyes set on the ceiling, tapping his foot against the coffee table, breathing through his cerebral mist, unmistakably lonesome.

Jack crumpled on the bathroom floor, head leaning against the wall, eyes fixed in much the same direction as Danny’s, foot tapping against the base of the toilet, unmistakably





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Jack returned after a moment with a flushed face. The left leg of his pants had gotten tucked into a part of his sock, and Danny yearned to set it free. Jack's breath was calculated and symmetrical, expanding within him to the count of four, *one two three four*—followed by a protracted release, *four three two one*—in perfect silence.

—He breathes like a millennial.

--

“Is there a window open somewhere?” Jack asked, shivering.

“Probably,” Danny said. He rose from the chaise lounge and walked into his room, and then into the Guest Room, and then returned and sat back down.

“We left the door open.”

-

—You have vacuum sealed your reference frame.

“That explains it,” said Jack.

--

—Some Times the skin seals....

—But other Times it's too late?

“Do you know what happened to your father?” Jack asked.

—Are you so lucky?

-

“I know,” Danny said. “But I don't remember.”

—And I can't forget!

—& get your nose out—

“Sorry,” said Jack.

—a poet—

—& one grand unfinished story!





“What a prospect,” Jack said. “Family.”

—What a loose thread.

—*loose dread.

“It’s everything till it’s not,” Danny said.

“But you can make new ones,” Jack said.

—pl.?

“You’re right, they’re self-replicating. The family particle decays into its child-photons.”

—& illuminated spaces are photon cemeteries.

—I am reminded of soil!

*Soil like their dead parents, soil like a Text called “Was,” existing boundlessly;
devouring the future through its mouth, the Now, reclaiming its children,
decomposing them into dirt, into “Was,” fertilizing the soil—
the Still—the compost (that we call...—
[see Act IV].)*

-

—fertilized with ash &/or dead & decaying life;

—& so all contain the blood of their creators,

—& so all Texts/bodies contain immanently

—within them the dirt (is a text called...)

—as in, the narrative “Was,” inscribed

—in the deadparentsoil:

—all stories are continuations:

—the parents’ epilogue

is the child’s prologue:

—the whole historical cycle! crystalized within us.





—“History repeats itself,” they say—

—“The apple never falls far...,” they say—

—& I can’t forget.

“You think the nature-nurture dialectic is missing something?—as in, I don’t know, our independent deliberation? The autonomy we practice? The actions and perceptions of the individual outside the family unit?”

“That’s what the nature-nurture dialectic determines, right?” Jack said. “That’s what makes us human. The sequence of causal events” precipitating the exact identity of the Still:
—the epilogue cannot

be emancipated from the subsequent prologue.

“—you know, behind the scenes, determining everything we do.”

“Right,” Danny conceded. “The product must agree with its ingredients.”

—That’d be like changing a character’s name part way through a book,

—said Mark.

“So there’s really no escaping your upbringing,” said Danny.

“I don’t think you can escape it,” Jack said. “But I think you can make peace with it, somehow. Liberate yourself from its bondage.”

—Apply your deliberation/Will sufficiently to every province of your own Text so that all consequences of the previous historic snowglobe (deadparentsoil) can be reclaimed by your own agency;

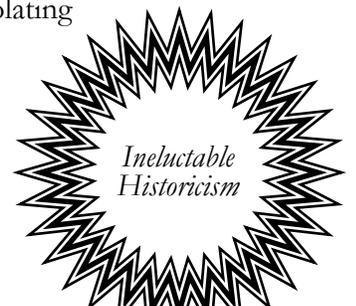
—Indeed, how to do such a thing.

—Much the same way that a particle rids itself of mass without violating conservation:

—it decays into light.

—Each half-life of a Danny Particle, then,

—approximately a decade; ergo, due again shortly.





—Liberate yourself from its impossible mass (weight, soul);
—A tragedy is described as having weight (gravitational pull on your mind/mass)—
—but matter can always be made into light; energy;
—& so in an ideal universe,
—all matter thaws back into energy; light; heat;
—which is obviously preferable.

--

—My body is heavy.
“But I don’t know how to do that,” Jack said. “My life has been cast with the color of War for seventy years. It doesn’t wane. It’s written in my every day.”
—...before the wound heals.
“You’d need an awfully delightful childhood to be able to forget what it was like. To be able to clean off the cast.”

“Or maybe the color of the cast of delight is clear,” Jack said, immediately losing his grasp on their discussion.

“Or maybe it’s just light,” Danny said.

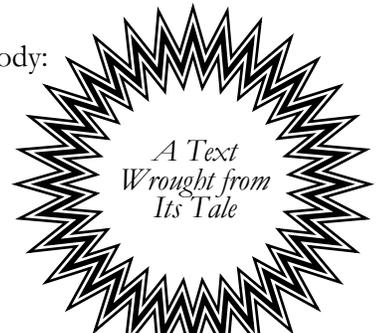
—My body is—

“Right,” said Jack. Danny was submerged in thought. Jack looked at the clock, but the alcohol had dried his eyes, blurred his vision, transfiguring the numbers on its face and the positions of its hands into blotted nameless symbols. He figured it was late enough that it no longer mattered: Time tends to vanish for about six hours every night.

Inside, a reaction had begun.

—My pupils dilate to the width of Einar’s as I stare from beyond my body:

—& Einar’s teeth bite my lips; it is not the child,
—but the child’s untold story, parallel to my own:
—the alternate reality where he never changed his name,
—& his alternate body clammers out of my own.





—Einar’s feet step out of my boots; his hair falls out of my head;
—his fingers withdraw from mine as though from a glove;
—his arms from my torso as though from a shirt;
—next he cranes his spine, stretching his vertebrae backwards in an arc,
—displaced from my own; he steps one foot out of my leg,
—and then the other, dislodging his hips, and finally,
—he slips his visage out from beneath my mask,
—and I watch him walk away.

Jack considered the vertex of exhaustion that seemed to him indistinguishable from hallucination. He felt, suddenly, a strange and unprecedented warmth emanating from those distant memories that so often radiated fear: nearly provoking him to endeavor into their wilderness: terrifying nevertheless.

“What’s the color of War?” Danny asked. “That’s cast over your whole life?”
—My ‘whole life.’

“That’s a good question,” Jack said. He tried to visualize it. He tried to recall the timbre of autumn 1939 against the following year’s. The first was drenched in sunlight, but so was the second:

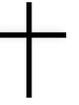
—Surely not so;
—Autumn 1940—
—I see a sun dialing across the sky,
—its arc marginally lower each day,
—till it’s consumed by the horizon, and civil twilight. There!
—I can’t recall a sunrise since.

“When I revisit it, the whole memory bundle, there’s no color.
But it leaves me with the faint impression of a polar night in Svalbard.”

“What’s Svalbard?” Danny asked.
—Uttered, it resurfaces.

“It’s a place in Norway,” Jack said.





—
“There’s a real place on earth called Svalbard?” Danny said, bewildered. Jack laughed.

“It does sound made up, you’re right.”

—Svalbard!

—where all is snow and evening Time.

“I bet I’d fit in there,” Danny said. Jack laughed.

“Not much to fit in with, honestly.”

“Have you been there?”

Jack seemed to ignore him. Danny imagined the realm of Svalbard. He saw sharply angled cliffs breaking the landscape into fragments, and a fluid fog rolling through rivulet valleys. He saw little wooden houses in clusters on riverbanks. He saw forests of old, short trees.

“It’s a tundra.”

—All right, no forests.

“Is it in the North?”

“It’s an archipelago in the Arctic, a ways off the coast,” Jack said.

—
—Einar’s alternate body clearing away the cobwebs that keep it fused to my own;

Jack was visited by a vast wave of energy.

“How come you’re not married?” Danny asked.

—taking scissors to our deixic evolutionary thread.

—
“I guess it’s just that I’ve never been in love,” Jack said. “And ever since I was young, the thought never struck me much. The drive. Whatever you call it.”

“Have you come close?” Danny asked.

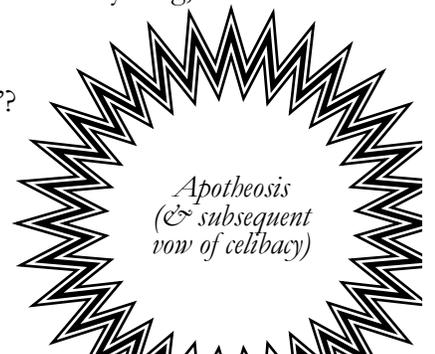
—Who has ever approached love and stopped when they were “close”?

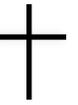
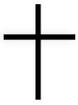
“No, I don’t think so. I’ve never been with a woman.”

—What serenity!

“No kidding,” Danny said. “Maybe you’re asexual.”

“At least subsexual,” Jack said. Danny almost laughed.





“Some Times I wonder if marriage is a natural thing for humans,” Danny said. “Where else in nature do just two things inextricably fuse with one another and stay that way? Nature always demands diversity and change. Especially in biology—and we last for *so long*. It must take a miracle to find love that doesn’t die before you do.”

“Or before they do.”

“Maybe it is a good thing. Maybe we do function better in pairs. Who knows.”

“I don’t feel at home among women,” Jack said.

--

“I don’t feel at home around kids,” Danny said.

“I can’t see you as a father,” Jack said. He realized after the words came out that they were perhaps a little sharp.

“Yeah,” Danny muttered under his breath, fingering a loose button on the upholstery of the chaise lounge. “Well.”

“That isn’t a bad thing.”

“I guess I am more in touch with my feminine self.”

“What do you mean?”

“I don’t know.”

“Because your father wasn’t around?”

“I don’t know.”

-

—Always oscillating between two poles: the progenitorial Still
descending into
vacua;

—But Young Danny fills it with women.

—Mrs. Silver!

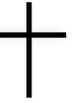
—Phoebel!

—Merlot!

Yes?

—I will become
what has driven me in twain: the y chromosome;





—The thought alone is coy enough to arouse.

—Women and Men
and Danny.

—The exclusion: the bitter incision of it:
—it: being Not Him, (nor her)
—but knowing Him:

—Blazes—

—the shape of the shoulders she clung to;

—the thickness of the beard that chafed her lips;

—the face she held between her thighs;

—the eyes her gaze had fixed to in their passion:

—if I try hard enough,

—if I let its acid sting wash over me completely, course through me, and remain still,

(which is no simple task: it requires a gracious capacity for pain,

a disenchanting murder of self-preservation,

a (literally) Selfless sense of humor,

& perhaps a touch of vengeance)—

and if I sustain it, channel the full magnitude of its impression through my imagination,

if I indulge my poisonous rendering of their exchange—her throes of pleasure—utterly,

by pretending I am her, lying on my back, legs linked around his figure, being witnessed,

—nearly gets me off.

You and me both.

-

—I don't give a shit about Blazes.

This is something else.

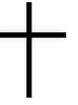
This is illiteracy in carnal dialogism:

When I was younger my teacher told me
that he used to teach disabled kids, and one Time,
he asked one of his students, "How does it feel,
being autistic?" and the boy responded, "It feels
like everyone can read each other's minds,
but I don't know what they're saying,"

—describing precisely my experience with romance.

—& Merlot whose carnal dialect is so cursive, so eloquent!





—Howling her rhapsody of touch,
 —nonsense in my ears.

But I don't want to understand her.
 Some Times I think I just want to be her.

—Those
 are the hardest Times.
 —So I let her be her, in her own body,
 and I yield my own to fate, liberated from its bondage, losing touch with touch,
 and turn my gaze around, back inside my own mind-fort, furnished with women,
 but I refuse to speak with them; I do not even look.

—In Here I am free.
 —In Here there are no Others,
 —without whom, vocative exchange becomes merely...
 —rhetorical.

--

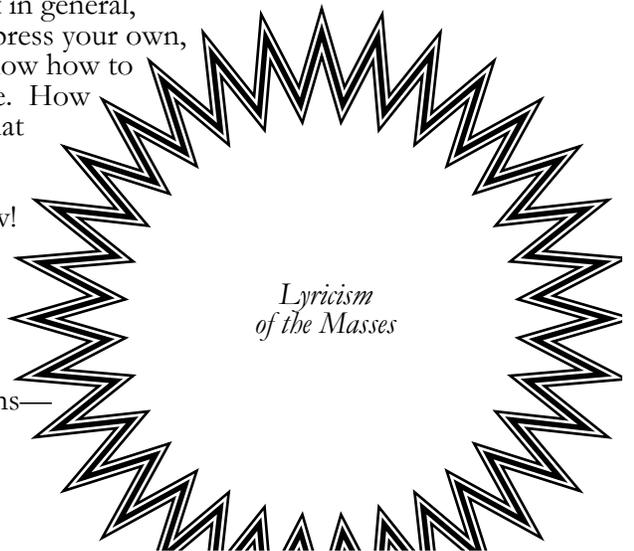
"I've never able to think the way a man does," Danny said.

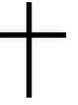
"That isn't a bad thing either," Jack said.

"It might be."

"How come?"

"Because I feel it. It's a disconnect. A big fissure between me and—I don't know—the dynamics of it. The man and woman exchange. The infinite iterations of that one equation, the unspoken equivalency of it: some intrinsic perception of the whole relationship, lost on me, that reveals all its motives, all its desires, all its answers—the perception that grants us access to that realm, innate knowledge of the body, of lust in general, and the ability to sense another's attraction, to casually express your own, and the impossible ease with which it happens! I don't know how to describe the turmoil those interactions tend to have on me. How can someone be so comfortable with—I don't know—what they want? or that they want it? How can someone be so fearless in the face of rejection? or insecurity? or even just the sheer discomfort of it? to ask a woman to dance—how! how can you make that proposal without—I don't know, not even fear of rejection, but fear of admission—do you know what I mean? Admission to your desires, without any shame for your thoughts. The things that stir me—the shit my brain does to the people I love—I'm terrified of my id. And I'm terrified of the power of those emotions—how can anyone be so calm, speaking with just their eyes?"





“I’ve had all these questions all my life and I haven’t met anybody else who has them. As long as I can remember. Since I was ten. Just a string of confusion, that whole realm of experience—it baffles me, it stings me, it tricks me. I have never understood. But maybe that’s just the nature of it.”

“I don’t think that’s the nature of it,” Jack said.

“Yeah. Me neither.”

Jack became disconcerted suddenly by a moment of *déjà vu* that left him briefly certain he’d just risen from a dream. Danny’s presence seemed much more visceral and uncomfortable than it had a moment ago, like all the alcohol wore off all at once. He realized he had to pee.

“Excuse me.”

-

Jack moved with sudden urgency into the kitchen.

—Ah, there you are, my daemon of insecurity,

—repeating my words as soon as I speak them, re and re and re

—repeating, till they sound absurd (Numb).

—Young Troubled Danny expresses concern over intimacy issues with senile

—Visitation; falls asleep.

“Mew,” said Incitatus, eyes fixed to Danny’s.

“Pour me a drink,” Danny said back.

Jack returned a moment later with a glass of water. The two of them had established a large network of dishes across their corner of the coffee table. Danny tried to remember the day of the week, the date,

“What’s the date?”

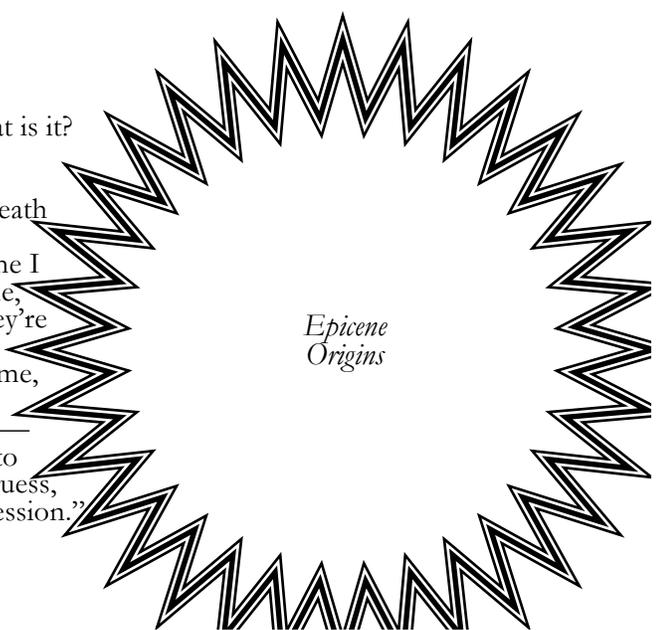
“It’s October eleventh. I guess now it’s the twelfth.”

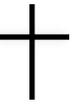
“What were we talking about?”

“The nature of it,” Jack said. Dan remembered.

“I guess that’s the root. And still I can’t place it. What is it?”

A long thread, or maybe the lines of an angle that expand infinitely from their origin, the exponential curve of the butterfly effect—a slow withering of masculinity, whose death poisoned the well of my confidence from the beginning. It has always made me uncomfortable when women assume I desire them because I am a man. It has always bothered me, the assumptions my gender makes about me—because they’re so off—defining me by a set of patterns which I’ve never really been able to mime, by an energy that’s never found me, and yet it’s who I am. I don’t know if I ever felt attracted to women until I met Merlot. Before that, it was different—it was something else, something implacable, not a desire to be with somebody... but for the choice to be received, I guess, or to be desired, or—I don’t know, a bizarre logic of repression.”





“That’s something you grow out of,” said Jack.

“That’s the easy way out. It’s already inscribed. Its installed in the Timeline of my memories.”

—Caught between two poles:

- 1. The progenitorial Still: its densest gravity;
- 2. The specious present, the Absolute Now—

—Manifested in the Relative Now—

At first a harmless thread, but woven so vastly and for so long,
that its color (white chipping paint) now weaves
a massive real estate in the fabric of Danny;
the construct of my memories, my identity, built on its bricks.

—Threads upon threads

—defining my trajectory, which

lead me to the Pharmacy Parking Lot

—and beyond:

the white thread characterizes my (our) text,
dilutes itself into the contents of my (our) Bordeaux Glass,
the hue of wine painted pastel, like a Lilac galaxy.

—But what effect has it had?

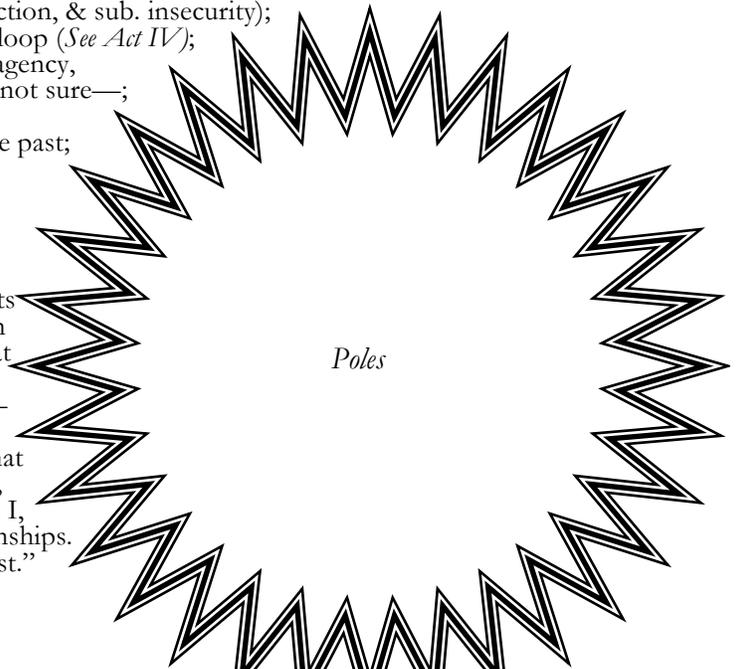
- 1. My epicene origins;
- 2. The Pharmacy Parking Lot;
- 3. My admission (& subsequent rejection, & sub. insecurity);
- 4. Our blooming negative feedback loop (*See Act IV*);
- 5. The consequent vices, decisions, agency,
—which belong to whom? I am not sure—;
- 6. Our consequent slopes;
- 7. The irreparable permanence of the past;
- 8. The Absolute Now.

—Indeed, a better question might be:

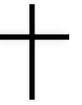
—what effect hasn’t it had?

“I think *that’s* the easy way out,” Jack said.

“You’re fulfilling your own prophecy, you’re blaming your woes on the same trait that you feel misrepresents you. Doesn’t it go deeper than gender? it’s the human condition, to interact with an-other—it’s the force that wrought us out of the dirt. It goes deeper than some binary conception of yourself and those around you—it’s the recognition of that binary which identifies us, the fact that we are somehow capable of perceiving that difference, that tension between the self and an-other, it is those dynamics which move us—not even you or I, but life itself, and deliberation as a whole—it’s relationships. That’s what gives us mobility, understanding—contrast.”



Poles

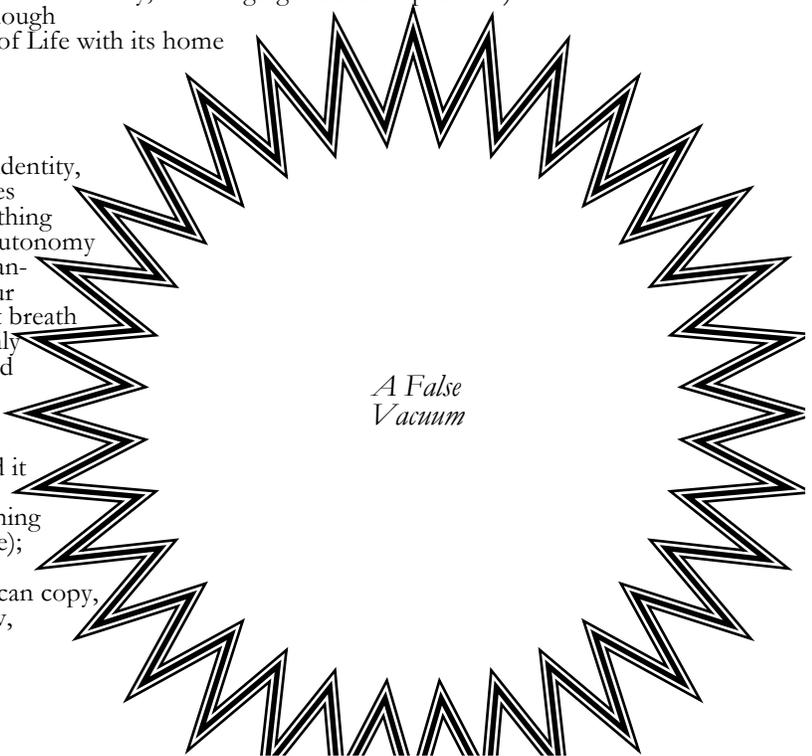


“But what does that mean?” Danny said. “If we’re fundamentally described by an insurmountable fissure between self and other, what does that say about life? to arise out of that—that—Oedipal uncertainty, you know, that innately disruptive cleavage of gender—the ruinous distinction between public and private—however you sing the difference—we’re inextricably fused to its consequences, risen out of the dirt like information out of noise, promised at birth back to the soil that engendered us, stuck! mired in the forsaken mud of it all, the syrupy, festering moisture of life; this vast and humid melting pot of bodies and instincts. The recipe is defined by its ingredients, and our ingredients are already mixed, inseparably blended: we are animated into consciousness by an unnatural segregation of noumena, when the perfect ease of material existence is fractured into an impossible matrix of ‘selves,’ the dynamics you’re talking about, they’re just illusions of perspective, the whole—what do you call it?—the whole mobility of sentience, the deliberation we inherit, then, is absolutely contingent upon isolation: some existential umbilical cord between us and our universal mother is severed, spewing us into a protracted decay, back into its composition—matter—the dirt. Is that the impetus you’re describing? the divergence of life from the perfect existence of substance? that illusion of separation that curses us, it drags us into individuality, kicking and screaming, literally—a bisection which we spend our whole lives trying to mend, chasing the absence of an-other, which is fundamental—trying to reincorporate ourselves into some elusive, nebulous comfort of multiplicity, a comfort which can never be restored, like broken glass can never be resealed.”

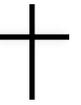
—Cleft apart by the intrusion of empty space,
 —neither the force of desire (that Oedipal uncertainty, that longing for reincorporation)
 —nor the gravity of death strong enough
 —to reunite the divorced stuff of Life with its home
 (the ground below [the text]).
 —O, life:
 mercilessly excluded,
 inordinately isolated.

“Even if it’s that tension which gives us our identity, is it not also that tension which subsumes our lives with a deep thirst, an existential craving for something entirely intangible: the force which pulls us into autonomy drags us out till death, taunting the reunion with an-other like it’s hanging at the end of a treadmill, our beaten and limping bodies determined till our last breath to reach something which we don’t realize can only be found in death—the dissolution of the self, and to forget what is an-other—”

—& to cure the cleavage, the open wound
 (like a vacuum) between the two,
 —which gropes to seal the world around it
 within it,
 —tries to fill up that void with anything
 but itself (parents; romance; pleasure);
 —its Self, with which it alone is
 —compatible: a code that no other can copy,
 —a conjunction that no other can follow,
 —a Guest Room that no other can fill.



*A False
 Vacuum*



—It is the empty room beside mine that echoes my name inside the names of others, like the wall between them marks the collision of the two, the threshold of company and isolation—where if the Guest Room is filled, I am not alone; but so too are we both alone within either room (& mind).

As though its permanent structural presence (ha!) in the Palace of Me is merely metonymical for the irreparable fracture between the two.

Which is fine, and yet not.

For it bounds forth down the hallways into the Palace of Me, bumping loudly against the walls every so often, refusing to muzzle its violence.

It must somehow remain tethered in the Palaces of Others, installed into the structure as a permanent fixture without autonomy, bound within a room, between two locked doors.

Which begs the question, what if one door collapses? This, apparently.

An absence, an antiparticle, a vacuum, set loose down the Timeline of a life, woven so vastly and for so long that it defines the borders of its own Notness by bumping into my cerebral furniture, defining its physical form by collision, till by now it's so ubiquitously plotted on my graph that the absence becomes presence.

As with any origin, it must be tracked in reverse.

—From the Absolute Now, in which Jack is my guest:

a reminder of externality, essentially;

formerly it was filled by her picnic of selves:

(my picnic of others [selves])

precariously, stochastically;

& previously by an infinite feedback loop of mirrors:

a perseverated mirage of faces transposed upon each other like a Russian nesting doll,

as though the 1 in the universal binary

vanished, leaving a mirror in its

place, reflecting 0's face,

magnifying its interiority

ad infinitum;

& previously by [];

& previously by that—that Oedipal uncertainty, that ruinous polarity:

the gradual recognition of individuality,

my consequent vices, slopes, & my first

encounter with that harrowing

impetus of life, *desire*;

& finally, at my origin, by my innocence, which

remained inside the womb after I left it,

because it could not pass that threshold:

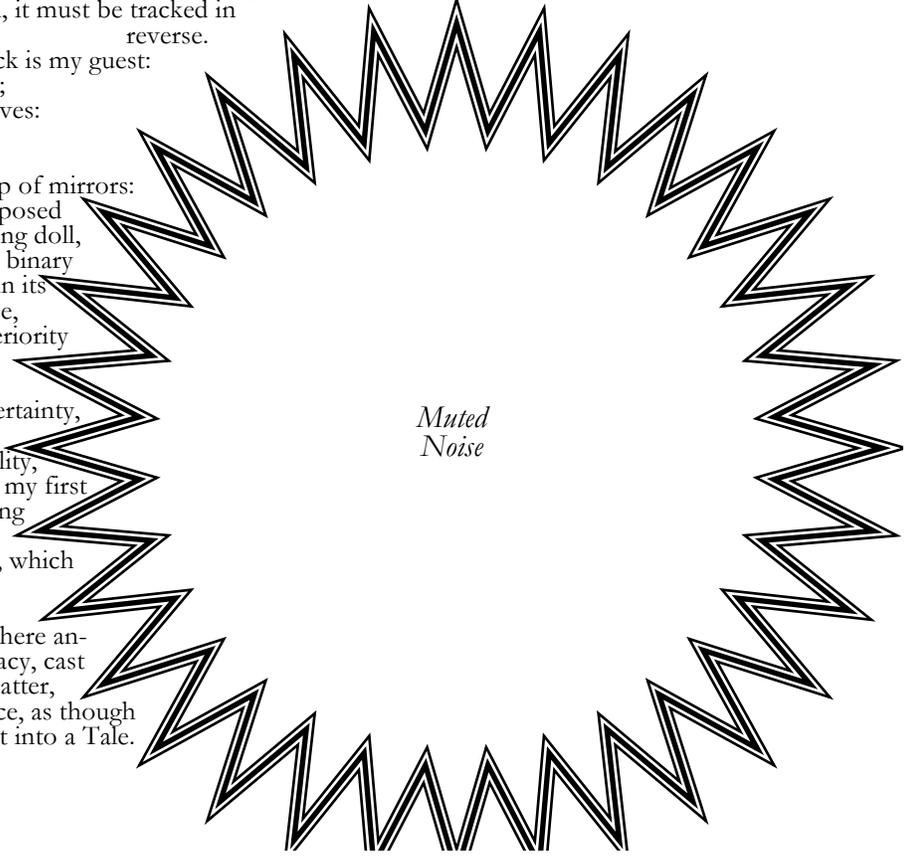
within the incubation tank of life, where an-

other Self germinates out of inanimacy, cast

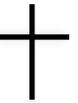
out of the eternal nonchalance of matter,

and thrust into the muck of sentience, as though

through a womb-portal, from a Text into a Tale.



*Muted
Noise*



—But where did I diverge? What cautery eluded me, which would seal the vacuum within a shell?
 —I see a see saw, but no fulcrum.
 —I see a binary star system in perfect orbit, neither one's gravity strong enough to subsume the other's, locked in a symmetrical dance.
 —And then I see one vanish.
 The other, violently liberated from its dialogue, whirls away into space.
 —And subsequently, the whole system of planets follows.

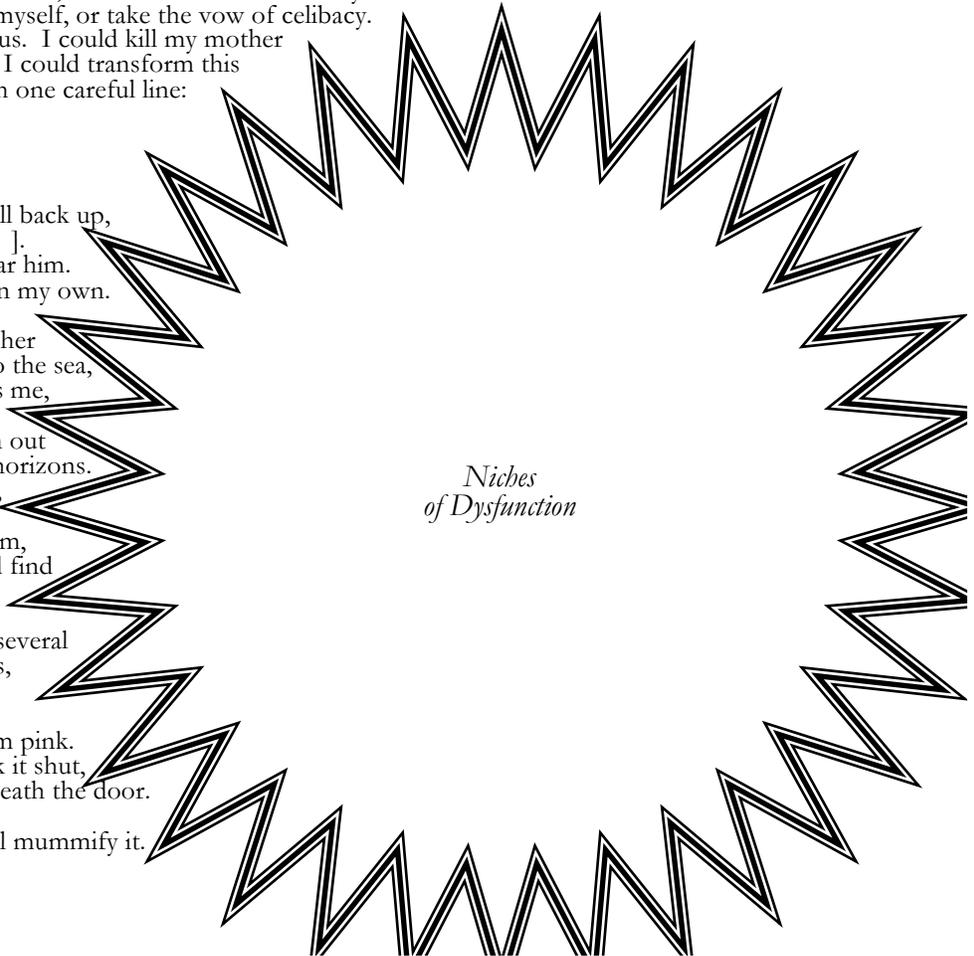
—The exhaustingly sustained dialogism is forfeit.
 I only want a name for this knot in my coding. How nebulously it exists in ubiquity, not unlike the sensation of Time; it could drive me mad, and perhaps it will.
 It's the ripple of a dynamic installed in all of us, yet mine is so great in proportion to others'.
 I drove down a long, straight road, and as though a wheel came loose, I came to a stop, my vehicle jerked, and thenceforth could only move in feeble circles around itself.
 I could castrate myself, or take the vow of celibacy.
 I could kill my impetus. I could kill my mother and sleep with my father: I could transform this whole tragedy into a joke, with one careful line:
 —Jocasta had a Merlot complex.

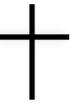
—

Codependency (et al.)?
 -

—I only ever wanted her to fill back up, to see her smile again after [].
 I knew that I was too young to bear him.
 I felt the weight, much greater than my own.
 I knew that she had lost direction.
 Still, I watched her sail. I even let her steer into a cliff, and as I dove into the sea, I said, I'll love you till Merlot finds me, all washed up.
 I woke up in Merlot's ship and ran out to the deck, threw my eyes at the horizons.
 My mother's ship was lost in tides, its Silver sails swallowed by salt.
 Merlot put her hand on my arm, she said we could sail wherever I'd find peace. Where was I going before?
 I told her, Sail away.
 The shores of Away were host to several sharp crags, hidden in the shallows, which we failed to detect.
 I'm still stranded here.
 —I think I'll paint my Guest Room pink.
 I'll throw out all the furniture, lock it shut, and then I'll slide the only key beneath the door.
 It will be Schrodinger's bedroom.
 —I'll murder its interiority. I'll mummify it.

*Niches
 of Dysfunction*





Danny had trailed off minutes ago. Jack watched his eyes cloud over.

“You think that’s really all we live for? That life is just isolated matter, trying to fit back into a pile?”

“Oh who knows,” said Danny. “Maybe, right? Maybe all the tragedies, all the missed turns of history are just the fallout of one big predetermined pattern, destined to fail. Maybe we can cast off responsibility for anything we do, blame it all on our organic clockwork. Maybe I can blame this whole mesh of turmoil on that innate dynamic, that bisection of self and other, because it bred the distinction between man and woman, passive and active, public and private—that poisonous contradiction, doubled when my father left, and again after my mother’s death. And maybe our whole relationship followed that precedent of absence, borne beyond my control—precipitating every dependency, like an impossibly specific recipe for a drink that’s a lot stronger than it tastes.”

“Is that what you think?” Jack asked.

“Sure, I think it. But I think a lot of things.

Maybe it’s really just been me, this whole Time.

After all, it’s been my mind that decides, my

body that acts, right? I’ve made all my own

choices. I’ve been privileged. Educated.

And yet, when I think back on it all,

‘all,’—this whole fraction of my life,

like one inscribed within another, it

seems written by somebody

else entirely, penned by another

voice with no regard for my own,

like the author of my text, the sum

total of my moments, has

written my narrative so long

and thoroughly that his identity

somehow transformed in the

making, by the process,

so all that’s been written up

until now is just the carapace of

now, the past like a snake’s

shed skin, like arriving

at the destination of an

inordinately long journey, only

to realize that what you were

chasing moved across

the sea while you were chasing

it. But I haven’t been chasing

anything—that’s the irony.

I’m lost in the weave of

Time, at the forward end of a long

thread that fastens me to my

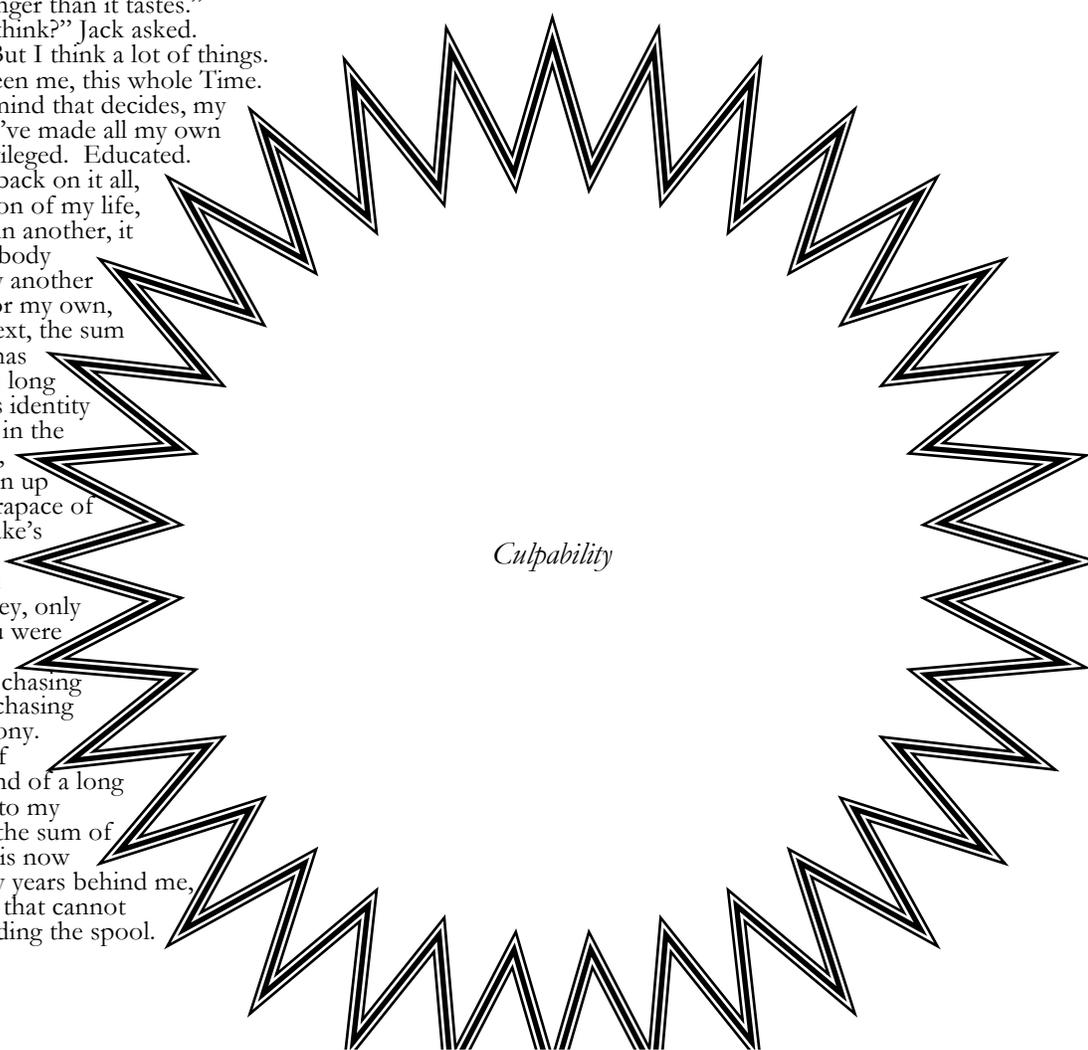
history, defines me by the sum of

my choices, but which is now

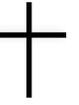
tangled on a barb many years behind me,

an error in the knitting that cannot

be fixed without rewinding the spool.



Culpability



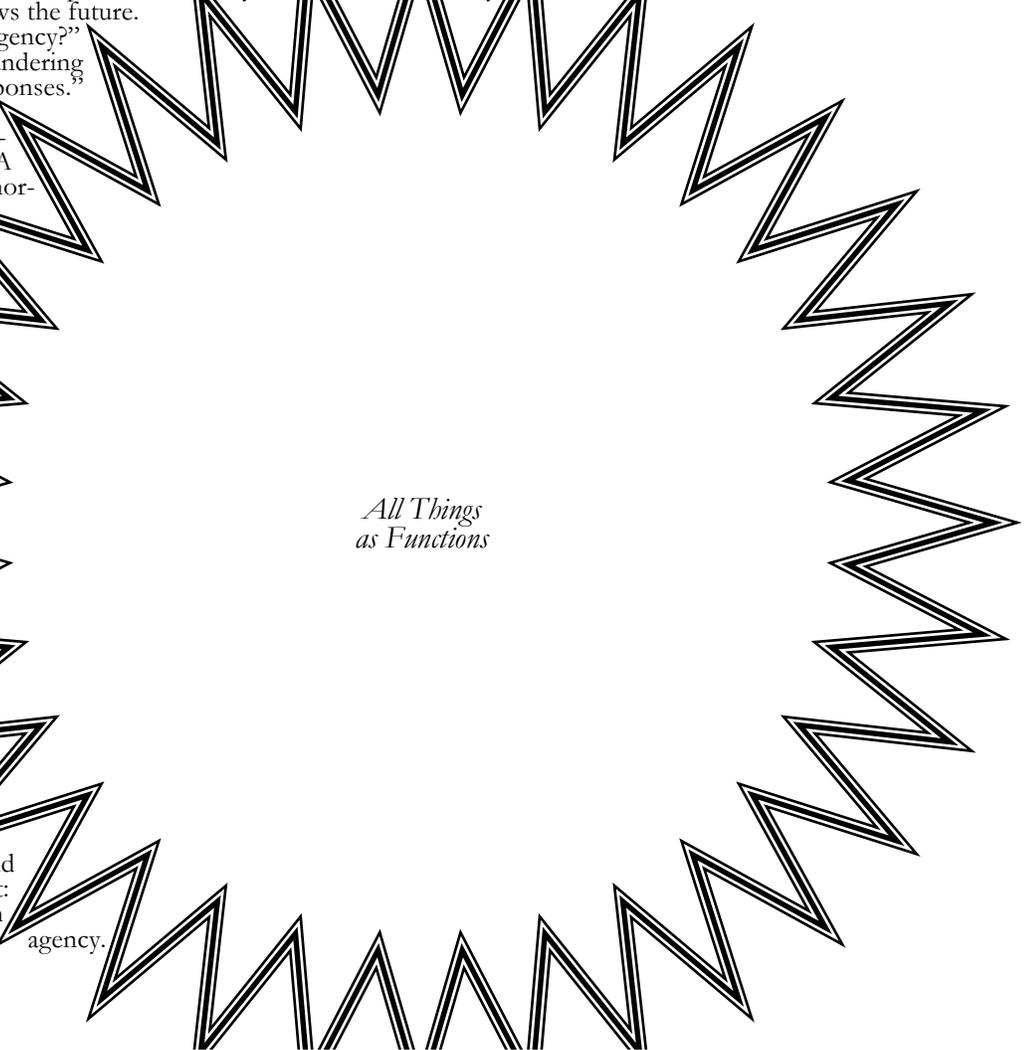
“I’m the absolute inverse of who I meant to be. So who, really, is in control? if who we are now is defined by all the people we have been—if we cannot escape the path of our lives, because it is only subject to our agency within this illusion of Time—for someone to whom Time is as a sidewalk is to us would say, ‘The sidewalk doesn’t get to choose its direction. It has no direction.’ Who decides what space the sidewalk occupies?—and I don’t mean the people who laid the cement, but rather the force which commands the order of space, which writes its identity, location, direction. Do you know what I mean? Is it the sidewalk which exists in space, or is it space which defines the sidewalk? Is it we, who commit the deed, that possess agency? or is it history, which precipitates the deed, using us as the catalyst? I don’t want to rid myself of blame. And blame for what?—I only want to balance the equation.”

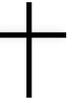
“It’s not so black and white,” Jack said. “You ought to know that—nothing is. We’re a product of history, of course. But it’s our will that adds our voice to that history, wherever in that history Time deposits us. We can’t affect the conditions that shape us, but we can emerge from those conditions however we like—the past is lost beyond our sway, but we characterize the present, and the present sews the future.”

“What motivates our agency?” Jack said. “A long and meandering synthesis of events and responses.”

“Sure. It’s an arrangement of the needs of countless independent systems. A treatise of biological authority, a Russian nesting doll of binary decisions, based on the struggle of mortality. Does this act promote survival? Yes or no. A Russian nesting doll of yeses and nos so absurdly perpetuated that the mechanism which pursues survival has now encountered its own identity—its own selfness—recognized the pattern which galvanized it, took control of every system which constitutes it, compiled the needs of every constituent into a loose, self-adapting algorithm to fulfill them—to meet, explore, and exploit reality to their profit: that long-adapted algorithm is will; what motivates our agency.”

*All Things
as Functions*





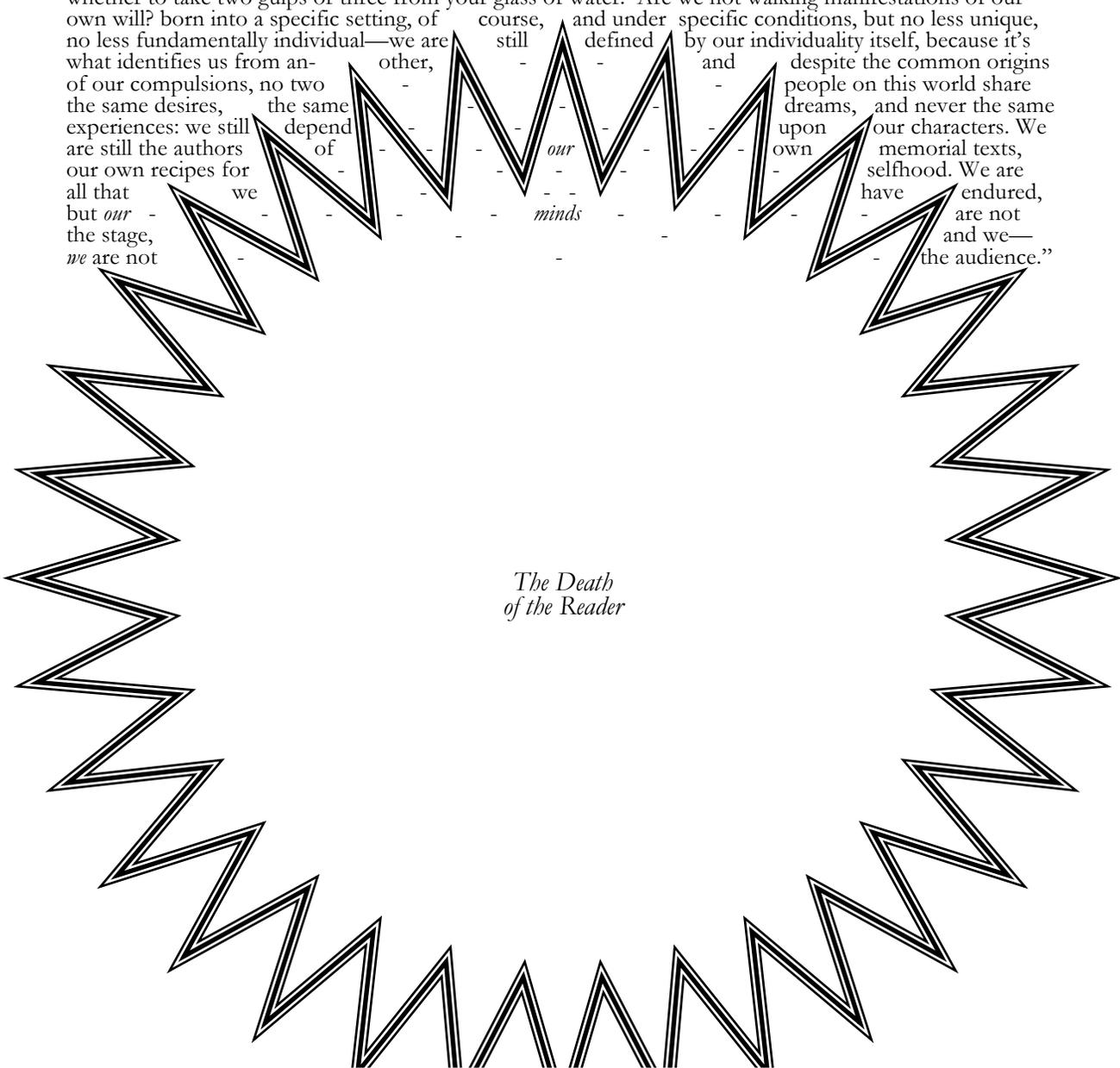
“As life, you’re right, we’re the aggregate of every desire iterated by our smaller parts. We’re slaves to our cells—like an ideal democracy, every system within us having an equal voice, all converged into the voice of our individuality—our thoughts, actions. Our words. And you can reduce every desire to the same few common origins: sustenance, safety, reproduction, et cetera. Reality’s just so messy, and we’re so dumbly adapted to it, that our—what did you call it?—our meandering synthesis of instincts has somehow morphed into consciousness—it has evolved around the absurdity of human life.”

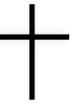
“The absurdity of human life,” Jack mimed. “You’ve given this some thought.”

“It’s just so strange,” said Danny. “To be. It’s the aleph of experience. I don’t know what to call it, that singularity of animation—that infinitesimal threshold, as small as the present moment, and just as nebulous, separating life from matter—what is it? What is the inception of deliberation?”

“Self recognition?” Jack said. “I don’t know. For all the academic nuances—how do you define your existence? by the accumulation of small moments, right? little excerpts of our free will, all the tiniest decisions we make—whether to rest your eyes on the wall while you submit to a thought, or on the floor; whether to take two gulps or three from your glass of water. Are we not walking manifestations of our own will? born into a specific setting, of course, and under specific conditions, but no less unique, no less fundamentally individual—we are still defined by our individuality itself, because it’s what identifies us from another, and despite the common origins of our compulsions, no two people on this world share the same desires, the same dreams, and never the same experiences: we still depend upon our characters. We are still the authors of our own memorial texts, our own recipes for selfhood. We are all that we have endured, but *our* minds are not the stage, and we—*we* are not the audience.”

*The Death
of the Reader*





—We are, then, the manifestation of Nature’s longing for introspection—
 a tool with which it gropes to witness itself, understand itself,
 latch on to its own pattern, and characterize itself:
 to fill up its identity with observation:
 the sheep that watches the cosmos.

—Our experience, then, defines that character: Nature’s texture—
 for without that perception so unique to life,
 matter rests in an indeterminate state of probability:
 an unwitnessed, uncertain receptacle for Time and experience.

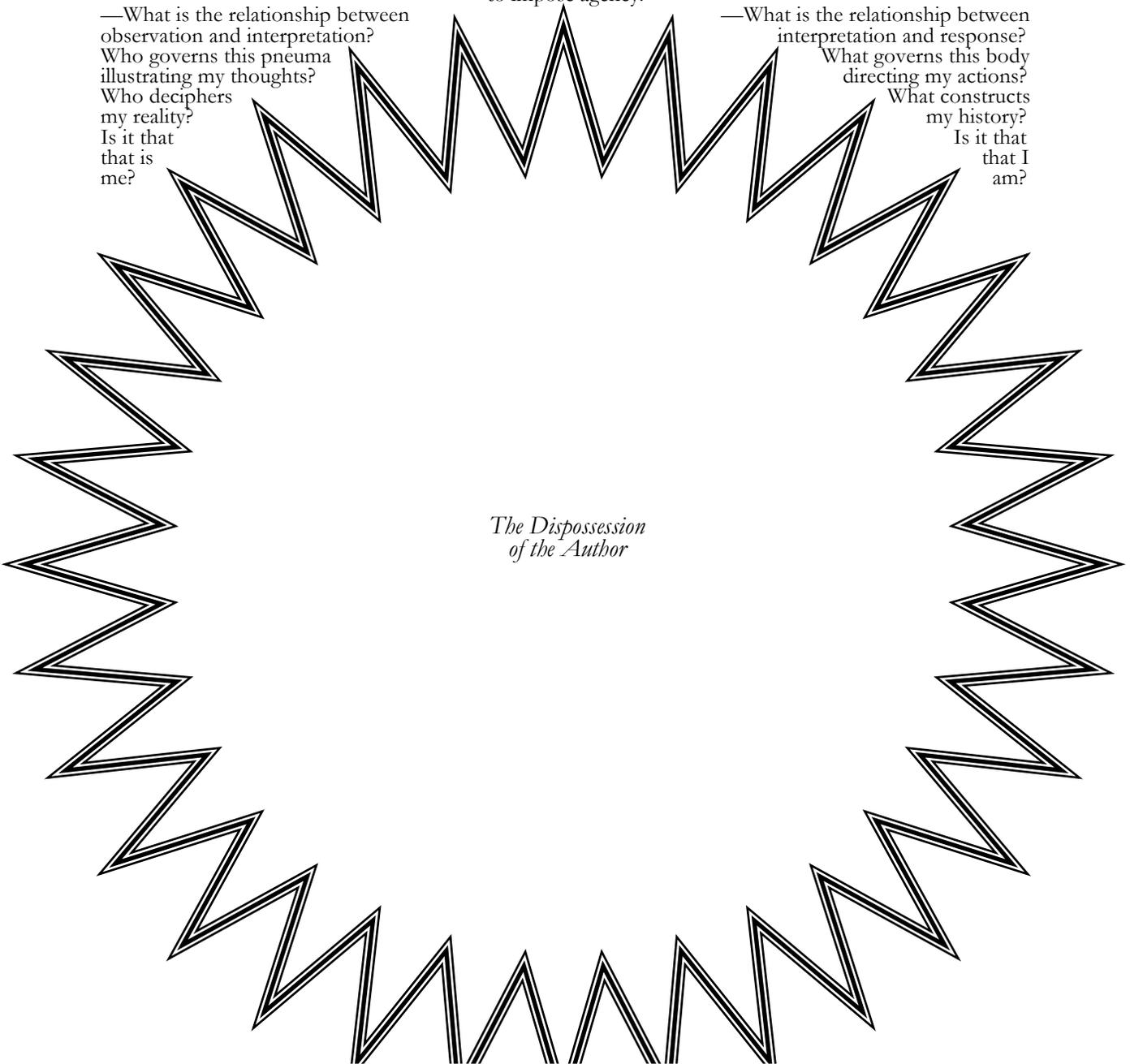
—Such a role ought to liberate Nature’s subjects from the responsibility of its authorship, shouldn’t it?—
 for history is written in ink, and so we are the eye which reads it, the mind which interprets it,
 & perhaps also the body which reacts to it, as if an unread text carries no meaning.

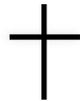
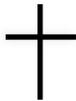
And yet to read is to subject the text to perspective: to translate it into
 the reference frame of the self, & its position w.r.t an-other;
 & so to read a text is to strip it of its symmetry,
 to strip the author of authority;
 to impose agency.

—What is the relationship between
 observation and interpretation?
 Who governs this pneuma
 illustrating my thoughts?
 Who deciphers
 my reality?
 Is it that
 that is
 me?

—What is the relationship between
 interpretation and response?
 What governs this body
 directing my actions?
 What constructs
 my history?
 Is it that
 that I
 am?

*The Dispossession
 of the Author*





--

—The real tragedy, then, is the mere fact of our dynamic position in reality:
our ability to interact with an-other, the Sphere of our Influence.

How miraculous! that humans have gestated a moral code,
with no ethical reality to compose it of, no chaperone.

And yet it's insufficient: suffering, passion—
these are intrinsic to existence: they

prohibit smooth passage
through Time.

Woe!

that we are here:

at the intersection of each
of our Spheres of Influence: at

the culmination of each causal avenue,

the singularity of each past sequence of events;

at the vertex, the specious present, through which Time

conducts our agency into the future: the past contracts into a point,

and vanishes for less than a second, during which we are born, and following which,

the scope of our jurisdiction grows at the speed of Time, dilating outward like a ripple in a pond.

We are, at least, not responsible for events beyond that cone: the speed of information is only so fast.

—But the mathematical sublimity that
is provoked by exponential growth

reveals just how boundless
our Spheres can become:

for if Time is endless,

our authority will

never cease to

invade

it.

And worse! the proportion of a single
event to the duration of our lives

gives any choice (so hastily
made that you can almost

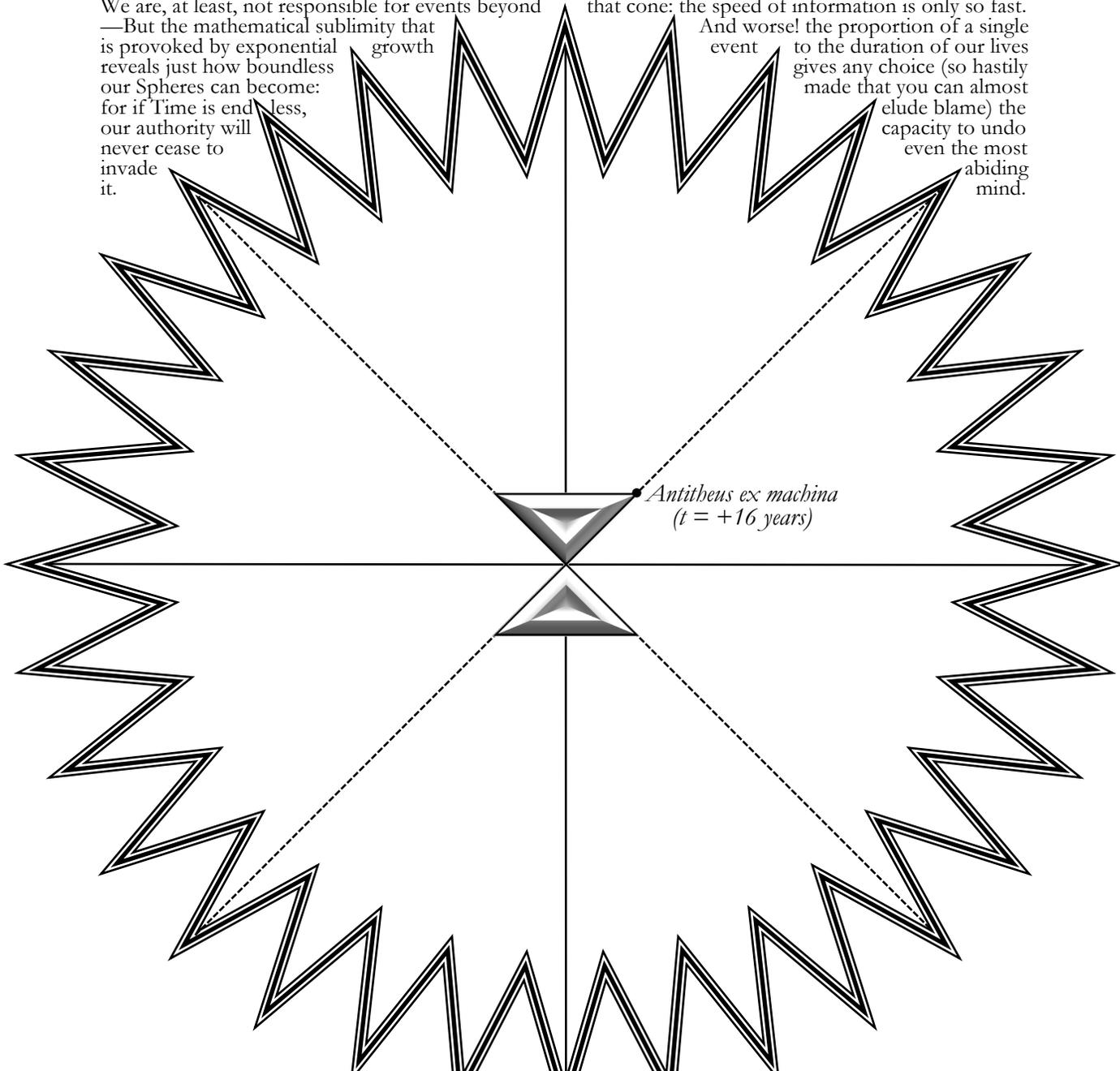
elude blame) the

capacity to undo

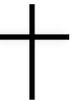
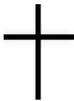
even the most

abiding

mind.



Antithesis ex machina
($t = +16$ years)



At last, I think I realize, it doesn't matter.
 In terms of how this will play out. Because I'll
 end up flipping a coin either way. That way I
 can forget all about this nonsense and say, "My
 coin is to blame,"—ridding myself of agency,
 stapling myself to the bones of fate, so fate can
 put me wherever it pleases, and all I must do is
 react, and never must act:

(a perseveration without the stimulus
 that prompted it?)
 all I must do is reflect, and never illuminate;
 refract, & never direct;
 transmit, & never radiate;
 scatter, & never assemble;
 diffract, & never consolidate;

& never ignite. Although, she's just as lost in
 mediation as I am, and two mirrors do not
 a lucid reflection make.

One must beware
 to think that a mirror
 can function as a light:
 you'd get lost in
 total darkness.
 You'd be blind
 as a bat
 in
 broad
 daylight
 !

What was her name?

It was unusual, I remember. But it's lost.
 For the best, perhaps. It ought to be where
 ever she is.

Somewhere in the North of Svalbard there's a
 wooden sign that reads: EINAR.
 Somewhere in Danny's Guest Room is another
 one that reads: JACK.

Names or no names, we'll be reunited soon,
 reincorporated, Danny would say,
 in perfect matter.

Then at last I can amputate this cumbersome
 third arm (Agency, Danny would call it).

Without which!... wait—
 ("Some Times the skin seals...")
 no, no—certainly not so abiding?

Time always has the last laugh. Even now, as it
 reminds me that you can't add an ingredient
 to a cake after you've put it in the oven.

Time's made up of little boxes
 that you don't always
 realize you're in, &
 once you
 escape one, it
 will freeze in ex-
 actly the
 pose
 you left
 it in, forever.

Anagnorisis

Ἀναγνώρισις

